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"GERTRUDE! MY DARLING, HAVE I FOUND YOU AT LAST!"

THE PRIDE OF THE CHEVENIXES.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"GERTRUDE, my dear, stand up, will you?"

"What for, mamma?"

And Gertrude Chevenix raised her head, and looked across the pretty morning-room, with something of satisfaction on her handsome face.

"That dress does not set properly. I knew it would not. I can see ridges all across the body. I really must give up Harbord; she does not know her business properly."

It is only the way I was sitting, mamma," Miss Chevenix said, rising and crossing the room to her lady-mother, to have her dress pulled and pinched and arranged, much to the disgust of her father and brother, who were both present.

Mr. Chevenix was a tall, aristocratic-looking

man, with white hair and extremely delicate features—weak, people were apt to say his face was—and, indeed, it was the face of a man who had never fought out the battle of life on his own account. It had always been easy work for him so far.

He had inherited his father's property and dutifully married an heiress (an indisputably lovely as well as wealthy girl), as the heir of a fine property should do, and he had brought up a family of two sons and one daughter in the orthodox fashion.

He had used the money that came to him as his lawyer suggested, and fancied himself a man of business because his name figured in endless speculations—some of which were successful and some failures—making him something poorer than he ought to be if he had been well advised.

But the head of the firm who had served his house for many generations was dead now, and a younger and more adventurous man held his reins of office, and arranged the Chevenix affairs.

Report said that there was mischief brewing

for his aristocratic client from his many investments, and that there had been ominous clouds hanging over the financial horizon of late, but Mr. Chevenix had not perceived them as yet, and was content to lead his aimless life, and let the world go by, so his lotus-eating calm was not disturbed.

His eldest son was a reproduction of himself—an embodiment of family pride—carrying his contempt for the working portion of the world to an extreme that sensible folks looked upon as a sort of insanity, and regarding his handsome face and person as far too good to be bestowed on any young lady he had encountered as yet.

Girls of sense and spirit looked upon Algernon Chevenix with a *souçon* of contempt, mingled with their admiration of his wealth and expectations, and preferred his younger brother, with whom his father was seriously angry.

There was something wrong somewhere, he used to say pathetically, when speaking of Herbert. He was painfully low in his tastes, and terribly vulgar in his ways. It was better things

had turned out as they had; which meant that he and his son had quarrelled, and that Herbert Chevenix, being a high-spirited young fellow, with plenty of common sense in a general way—his objectionable points notwithstanding—had elected to bid his native land adieu for awhile, and go to the Antipodes, where his strength and pluck and brains—which latter were with small account with his father—would stand him in good stead.

He was just a good-looking, healthy young Englishman, strong-limbed and clear-skinned, like his mother, but with more of her father in his face than herself, and the Vallerys of Cheme, as old a family as the one she had married into, had been athletic rather than intellectual.

Gertrude Chevenix, the only daughter of the house, resembled her father's family. She had all the aristocratic delicacy of features that was so marked in them, but with her younger brother's force of character; she had a will of her own, and exercised it, too, when she chose. She smiled at the disapprobation in her father's face, and the disgust her brother openly expressed.

"Really, mother!" he said languidly, "you might spare us such details. If Gertrude's gown does not fit let her put on another; it is none for you to pull her about as if you were a *modiste* in the execution of your duty!"

"I believe mamma is a born dressmaker," Gertrude said, with a little laugh.

"My dear child!" her father exclaimed in horror, "pray do not say such things. It is terrible to hear your mother compared to—"

"To anyone that is useful," the girl said under her breath. "I dare say it is. I did not compare her to anyone," she added aloud, "only she has a genius for it. She can tell in a minute whether anything will do, and Madame Harbord—"

"That will do, my dear; we do not usually talk of such persons except in the way of business!" and Mr. Chevenix took up his paper again with an air of dismissing the subject.

To him all such people as the fashionable *modiste* were creatures of another sphere—beings created to minister to his comforts and wants, but quite out of the pale of humanity as understood by a Chevenix.

"There's a coarse strain in Gertrude somewhere," Algernon said, lazily lifting up his golden head and contemplating the exquisite shape of his white hands. "I thought we had got rid of all that element when Herbert went away. Don't ape his ways, there's a good child; nothing is such bad form."

Gertrude shrugged her shapely shoulders and made no answer. She generally got the worst of it in any wrangle with Algernon. He was so horribly impatient and statuesque, she was wont to say to her mother, though she used some stronger terms to herself when speaking of him.

She resembled her second brother in bright ability and frank outspokenness, though all had been done that could possibly be accomplished to make a fashionable young lady of her.

She was impulsive, a quality which her father and elder brother abhorred, and chafed under the restraints of fashionable society in a way that no one but herself could have imagined.

She had been well drilled and had made her debut at Court, attracting no small attention when she kissed Her Majesty's hand by her fresh young beauty and the grace and elegance of her costume.

She had spoken truly when she uttered the sentiment that had so horrified her father and brother—her mother's taste had arranged her dress on the occasion of the Drawing-Room, and it was owing to her skill and care that Gertrude was spoken of as one of the best dressed girls in London.

Mrs. Chevenix had the tact and skill that are a fortune to a painstaking *modiste*, and she was hard to please; always, as the dressmakers declared, finding out faults that would have passed muster with anyone else, and insisting on combinations and arrangements that seemed all wrong at first, but invariably turning out the

very best things that could have been done when the effect was tried.

"You must take that dress off, dear!" she said to her daughter. "You cannot go to the Fontaines in a gown with wrinkles in it. What is the matter, Vere?" she added hastily to her husband, for he had uttered a slight exclamation.

Mr. Chevenix laid down the trim little pink sheet so dear to the hearts of one political party, and his wife saw that his face was very white.

"Nothing, I hope, dear," he said, quietly. "I picked up last night's *Globe*, that was all, and read a piece of news in it. You would not understand it if I were to read it to you; it has to do with the money market."

"Oh! then I'm sure I shouldn't," Mrs. Chevenix replied, with a little laugh. "I always muddle it all up in my head when it is read to me. Come, Gertrude, we have none too much time."

She went off with her daughter to dress for a drive, all unconscious that the news her husband had read meant almost ruin if it were true.

The rumour that a great City house was "shaky" had little meaning for her, but it was enough to bring great beads of perspiration on her husband's forehead, and make the hand that held the paper tremble like a leaf in the wind.

Mr. Chevenix read and re-read the article, with a horrible conviction that every uncomfortable word in it was true, though the *Times* had said nothing about it that morning.

He had let this man of business do almost what he liked with the funds at his command, and there had been a disagreeable "tightness" of late whenever he had applied to him for money.

Funds did not seem to be so easily available as they had been, and there had been an amount of evasion when he had hinted at a careful inspection of his accounts that he remembered uncomfortably now in connection with this newspaper article.

Recollections, too, of how often of late he had signed his name as director of this or that company, and how many shares in certain successes he had purchased at his lawyer's suggestion, began to crowd upon him and make him very uneasy—money matters were so perplexing and unpleasant.

True, Mowbray had said something to him not long ago about being careful, but Mowbray was his steward, and he had thought him very imprudent. He would send for him now, and ascertain what he meant.

"Anything wrong, sir?" his son asked, when his mother and sister were out of hearing.

"Everything; I'm afraid there's going to be a smash up in the City, unless this is a canard altogether, and I feel, somehow, that it is not."

"And will that mean going under?"

"To the very bottom."

Algernon Chevenix did not reply. Spoilt child of fortune that he was, never having known the meaning of an ungratified wish, he could not realise what ruin meant, and the magnitude of the idea tied his tongue.

"Talbot Verney admires Gertrude very much," he said, after a pause; "does that stand for nothing?"

"Talbot Verney is a duke's son," Mr. Chevenix replied, with a bitter smile. "He may admire her now, with the Chevenix money to enhance her charms, but he will hardly bestow his prospective strawberry-leaves on the penniless daughter of a bankrupt. Those are ugly words, but they will be the truth before long, I am afraid."

Algernon shivered, declared it made him ill to think of it, and finally went away to his room to be adorned and prepared for his daily ride.

The family ruin, if it came about, would not mean quite ruin to him. He had a little independent property of his own—about enough to keep him in clothes and pay his valet at present—but men lived about town with very little money sometimes, and he should get on.

He looked just as like a handsome statue as ever as he rode gently along the Row, catching

glimpses now and then of his mother's carriage, with Gertrude by her side, and Talbot Verney hanging about for the chance of a word with her.

His attentions had certainly been very marked this season. It seemed as if Miss Chevenix would be the future duchess, in spite of the counter attractions everywhere else. There was no reason why it should not be so; her family was as old as the Duke's, and there was money enough. It was a suitable match in every way.

Mr. Chevenix was thinking of it as he made his way to Lincoln's Inn, and sought an audience with his lawyer. He came away quite relieved. Mr. Daleford had pook-pooked his fears, and laughed at the paragraph in the *Globe*. Nothing could be safer than everything they had put their hands to, and in a very few days Mr. Chevenix would have ample proof of the truth of his statement. If he wanted any ready-money now he had only to say the word.

Mr. Chevenix always wanted ready-money, so he took a cheque, which the lawyer paid him with a smiling face, but many inward anathemas.

"There was no other way," he said to himself, when his visitor had departed. "It will set his suspicions at rest and give me time. I have not lied to him about the report; it is premature, at least. But it will be true, every word of it, and then—ah, well, I am prepared, and Mr. Chevenix must take care of himself."

Mr. Chevenix was radiant that evening in his family circle; it was not often they dined alone. Everything was going right, Daleford had said so, and shown proof of it by offering any sum of money that he wished for.

It was all right for Gertrude too. Talbot Verney had done all but propose; he had pressed her hand and looked into her eyes, and hinted that there was something he would say when a fitting opportunity came, and it would come to-night. They were going to a select ball, where they would meet him—one of the best things of the season. And Gertrude was going to wear a fetching toilette that had never seen the light, except in Madame Harbord's holy of holies; altogether, the world looked a pleasant place. Even Algernon was satisfied; he had almost made up his mind to propose to a certain fair and wealthy widow who had been flitting across his path lately, and she unmistakably admired him, in that he was the best contrast that could be imagined to the husband she had lost.

Just as dinner was over a letter was handed to Mr. Chevenix, and Gertrude saw that it was in the handwriting of her absent brother.

"Let me read it, papa, do," she said, as her father broke the seal. "I do like reading Herbert's letters; the doings out there are so odd, and he describes them so funnily."

"I would have all his letters destroyed the moment they are read," Algernon said, with a look of disgust at the careless-looking envelope and the sprawling handwriting. "I suppose there is nothing particular in it, sir."

"You are welcome to all the news it contains," the elder gentleman said, throwing the letter down on the table with a bang. "Fangh! it is sickening!" he added, in a voice almost choked with rage. "Never mention his name to me again, any of you; he has disgraced himself too utterly."

The letter announced that Herbert Chevenix, having been very ill in the house of a squatter, whose father had "left his country for his country's good" in the days of transportation, had elected to show his gratitude by marrying the daughter of the house.

CHAPTER II.

THE ball at the "Fontaines" was a magnificent affair, and the fairest of all the bright girls that made such a galaxy of beauty and grace was Gertrude Chevenix. The letter that had so agitated her father and filled her fastidious brother with supreme disgust was, on the whole, rather amusing to her. She wondered at Herbert; but he was not likely to come home at present, and

she would not be afflicted with the sight of her plebeian sister-in-law.

Mrs. Chevenix was terribly shocked, but she was dressing for the ball, when she really took in all that such a union would mean for her son and the whole family; and it would never have done to disturb the delicate bloom on her smooth cheek, or the careful pencilling of her eyebrows by an outburst of feeling. So she braced up her nerves, and tried to make a heroine of herself by telling herself that she must hide what she felt for Gertrude's sake.

In reality, she did not feel anything very deeply at present. Australia was a long way off, and all sorts of things might happen before she was called upon to meet her new daughter-in-law. She never need be spoken of, and fashionable society need not know of her existence.

Talbot Verney availed himself of the opportunity the ball afforded to dance and talk with Gertrude Chevenix to his heart's content; and in the conservatory was on the verge of clasping her in his arms, nestled in the shadows of the great palms that filled the place with foliage, and telling her there and then that she was the only woman in the world for him. A footstep startled him, and the avowal was not made, and a friend passing through the flowers with a pretty girl on his arm, whispered half carelessly, as they almost touched each other,—

"Take care, Verney!"

The opportunity was gone for the present. Gertrude had heard nothing, and she took her back to the ball-room and the clamorous partners who were waiting for her, and then sought his friend, who had adjourned to the library, set apart for the gentlemen on that evening.

"What did you mean just now, Swinton?" he asked, in an irritated tone. "Did you not see that I was engaged?"

"I saw that you would be before long," the young man replied, quietly. "I mean just what I said—take care."

"Take care of what?"

"Of yourself."

"How?"

"Well, in what I saw or guessed just now; there's mischief brewing in old Chevenix's affairs. I don't want to be prying or impertinent, but your name and the divine Gertrude's have been coupled, you know; and, I say, old fellow, don't be offended. I mean all I say in good faith, and not a soul knows anything about it yet."

It was rather a muddled speech, but Talbot Verney knew the speaker well enough to feel sure there was more than idle talk in his words.

"Go on," he said; and, thus adjured, Harry Swinton told him something he had learned from an authentic source. How the Chevenixes were, if not absolutely ruined as yet, so nearly on the verge of social extinction that a marriage into the family at present would be a most undesirable thing. He was a clear-headed young fellow, the son of a man who had made a fortune by thrift and forethought, and he inherited the parental qualities in a marked degree. Love would be a secondary consideration in his life.

"It's an awful muddle to have to draw back when once you have put your foot in it," he said, oracularly, and Talbot Verney laughed, though his heart was very sore. He really liked Gertrude Chevenix very much, and but for this interference he would have been bound to her by now. Perhaps it was all for the best. He must marry money, though he was wealthy. His rank needed a great deal to keep it up, and Gertrude Chevenix was said to have a large fortune. "You speak like an oracle, young one," he said, with a little laugh, though his lip would quiver in spite of himself. "Are you sure of what you have told me?"

"That the Chevenixes will soon be in a queer street! As sure as anyone can be who cannot foresee what a day may bring forth. If the tide turns and things go right, I have not done any harm, I hope!"

"None," Talbot Verney replied. "Forewarned is forearmed, you know. I might have taken it with a high hand and told you to mind your own business, but I know you mean well in what you say, and I thank you for it. You will not say it elsewhere, Swinton!"

"Talk of the Chevenix affairs, or of you? No, you may trust me for that," the young man said. And his friend knew that he might, and presently went home after a somewhat constrained allusion to the girl he had all but asked to be his wife.

Gertrude wondered. She had come to think that she should be his wife by-and-by, and she loved him or fancied she did. It was a splendid match, with the coronet of a duchess in the future; and it was not to be wondered at that she had let herself dream as girls will of the greatness in store for her. It would be all right, she told herself—they had been disturbed—he would speak the next time they met, and they must almost every day.

"Well, dear!" her mother said, when they were shut up in the carriage and driving home. "Has he—"

"No, mamma."

"I thought perhaps he had, my darling. I saw you go into the conservatory with him, and he marked you out so the whole evening that I made sure he intended I should know what he meant."

"The conservatory of a ball-room is not particularly retired," Gertrude said, with a happy smile, as she recalled the tender looks and words that had preceded the interruption that put an end for the present to her dreams. Her heart was sinking just a little bit as she thought of his almost cold farewell; but farewells cannot be very tender when they are spoken in the presence of a crowd.

"He had no right to make you the object of such marked attention if he means nothing," Mrs. Chevenix said, in an aggrieved tone. "It must come to an end, Gertrude. I cannot have my daughter played with."

"Oh, wait a little while, mamma!" Gertrude said, in dismay; the prospect of any interference was like a dash of cold water. "I think—I mean, that is, if it had not been for some people coming into the conservatory when we were there that— Oh, mamma! don't talk about it in that way. It will all be as you wish—I am sure of it."

Gertrude went to her own room, and tried with all her might not to think she was vexed at the turn affairs had taken. Somehow she felt uncomfortable in spite of what she had said to her mother.

There was such a curious alteration in Talbot Verney's manner when he bade them good-night; it struck a cold chill to her heart. The life had gone out of his tones, and he did not look at her with love beaming in his eyes as he had done not an hour before.

She told herself that she was tired; the ball had been a very animated and crowded one, and she had danced nearly every dance. She would sit down and read Herbert's letter before she went to bed. Poor Herbert! what a scrape he had got into now. A plebeian marriage was an unpardonable sin in her father's eyes.

It was a characteristic letter, outspoken and just like Herbert, who cared very little for the opinion of the world, but went on his way and enjoyed his life in a free-and-easy fashion that his sister secretly envied. She read the story of his illness, and how he had been nursed back to life by his wife and daughter of the man who had sheltered and aided him, and of how he came to love the girl who had been his nurse, and had married her.

He did not tell his home friends how he had been worked upon by the old man, as disreputable a character as his convict father had been, till he felt bound to make the rosy, warm-hearted Lena his wife.

She was a good, honest girl, bred and born in the bush, with about as much notion of the ways of the polite world as a kangaroo, but with much that was good and refined in her nature for all that.

"I don't ask for forgiveness," Herbert wrote, "or expect it. I know my father's prejudices too well. I shall make my living and my home out here; but I felt it was due to you all to let you know that there is a new Chevenix household at the Antipodes, and one which shall never do discredit to the old name as long as I live."

"No, I am sure it never will," Gertrude said warmly, as she put the letter down, nothing, as she did so, a small postscript. Her father had overlooked it in his rage, but it was not of vital importance. "I never knew till to-day that this letter had not been posted at the time it was written. Lena sent her own special servant with it to the post-office, nine miles away! Only think of that, and I discovered it only this morning carefully wrapped up in a horse's nose-bag! And it was written a month ago. Nothing of more importance has happened, so I have nothing more to add."

It was a sort of farewell. Gertrude felt it to be so. There was no word of writing again soon, and her tears fell upon the letter as she folded it up, after comparing the inside and outside dates. A month! Much might have happened in that month. In spite of Herbert's words, much had happened had she only known it.

Herbert's father-in-law met with an accident during the time the letter was lying in the folds of the horse's bag—nothing serious, everyone said, self included. He should be all right in a week or two; but weeks came and went, and he never rose from the couch to which he had been taken; and before the tardily-posted letter had reached England he was lying in a corner of the field that covered the little settlement for a burying-place.

His wife, an ailing woman at the best of times, drooped under her bereavement, and seemed to fade and grow feeble without any apparent illness, till a wet, unhealthy season set in, and brought fever and all sorts of troubles with it, sweeping off old folks and little children, and weakly people like the forlorn widow.

Lena Chevenix was an orphan, and as her husband believed a fairly wealthy one; but her mother was no sooner buried than there came down upon them bills and debts of which they had never dreamed. Everything seemed to be mortgaged to its full value, and Herbert realised, with a sick despair what he had done, and what his position would be.

The days seemed to go very slowly and drearily with Gertrude after the receipt of her brother's letter; the link that bound him to his home was broken with the unsuitable marriage, of which she felt sure in her heart that he was ashamed. No one spoke of him, no one seemed to think of him now; even her mother shrank from hearing his name, and her father had strictly forbidden any one to mention it in his hearing. Her own love affairs seemed to be in exactly the same place as they had been after the Fontaine's ball.

Talbot Verney had been away on some hurried business that she did not understand, and she believed in him so thoroughly, and was so completely unconscious of any reason for such a proceeding on his part, that she had no idea that he was leaving her down gently as it were by going away.

The dreaded panic in the commercial world had not come about as yet, and only those behind the scenes knew that it was only stayed off for a time. Mr. Chevenix had almost ceased to think of the possibility of such a thing; his lawyer was so very flourishing and so excessively sanguine about all the investments he had made for him and others.

Only Mr. Daleford could have told of a packed portmanteau in a handy hiding-place, and a certain belt which he wore night and day in preparation for a sudden flight. The lawyer kept his secrets well and let no one share them. There was talk still about the affairs of the family, but the prophesied crash had never come, and people began to think it was all a canard after all.

The family were in full conclave one evening; the London season had come to a close, and they were at the pretty country seat that Gertrude and her mother loved very dearly. Algernon and his father did not care for the country. There was too much freedom about it to suit their tastes; the proprieties were constantly being violated, and decorum set at defiance. They abhorred life passed in the ease of loosely-fitting clothes, and looked upon the absence of etiquette and the careless freedom of life in

Warwickshire as demoralising in the extreme. They both dressed and behaved exactly as they did in town, and Goombe Langley would have been as dull as it was pretty but for the bright presence of Gertrude and the good sense of her mother.

They were expecting friends to dinner on this particular evening, but Algernon had suddenly appeared. He had been away on a visit, and desired their presence in the drawing-room, as he had something of importance to communicate.

"We have done something dreadful, mamma and I," Gertrude said to herself as she responded to the summons, and went downstairs in her delicate dinner-dress, looking like a bluish rose, "and we are going to have a lecture. Algy always prefaces his outpourings with a summons to a sort of meeting."

But it was not to find fault with anyone's shortcomings that Algernon Chevenix had called them together. It was to announce that Mrs. Fetterlock Smith had at last condescended to accept his proposals, and was going to become his wife with all convenient speed. He should set up an establishment of his own very shortly, and come to make his father's house his home.

"I am very glad," Mrs. Chevenix said, "You will be safe, my boy, whatever happens to the rest of us."

Mrs. Chevenix hoped that her son would be happy, but Gertrude said never a word. She did not like Mrs. Fetterlock Smith, and thought to herself that she would rather make the acquaintance of Herbert's plebeian wife than consort with this half-bred widow, whose money had tempted her brother to marry her. The thought was in her mind when the door was flung wide open and the footman, a young servant who knew nothing of his master's second son, announced, in a loud voice,—

"Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Chevenix!"

CHAPTER III.

THEY had all been so engrossed by Algernon's news that they had never noticed the bustle of an arrival, nor remarked the extremely shabby cab that had been permitted to come up the avenue, in direct opposition to the orders of Mr. Chevenix and his son.

There it stood at the front door, to the wonderment of the servants and the disgust of the butler, who looked at it as one of Mr. Herbert's freaks, and was not a little astonished when that gentleman desired him to pay the driver.

"I'll get it off some of them presently. But just pay for me now and send him away, will you?" Herbert said, as he gave his arm to his wife, with a whispered injunction not to be afraid, and followed the footman to the room where the family were sitting.

The butler handed the cabman his fare, which that worthy split on and pocketed with much satisfaction.

"It's more than I expected," he said, with a grin. "He hasn't a rap!"

"What do you mean?" asked the butler, in disgusted astonishment.

"Just what I say. He hasn't a rap. They have left something at the place where they slept last night; they wouldn't believe that the bill would be paid, though the young gent told them that he was a gentleman's son, and was coming straight home to his people. They couldn't swallow it, you see, when they looked at her."

He jerked his hand in the direction of the hall, where an exaggerated hat with huge feathers, by no means in their first purity, was passing along to the family meeting.

"She's a caution, she is!"

"Here, drive off, will you?" the butler said, angrily. "We don't want any of your remarks here, my man! You have got your fare; get out, and mind your own business!"

"Oh, I can do that," the man said, "as well as most folks!" and with a defiant whistle he drove off.

Meanwhile, the assembled family were staring

in amazement at the extraordinary apparition that presented itself on the announcement of the servant.

It was Herbert certainly, but a dusty, travel-worn version of their bright young scapegrace. He had filled out and become strong and undoubtedly healthy-looking, but he was woefully shabby, and his hair and beard were untrimmed and rough-looking.

His hands were those of a man who is well acquainted with hard work, and his skin was tanned berry-brown. A greater contrast to his exquisitely attired brother, with his white hands and his needless, effeminate look, could not well be imagined.

On his arm was a girl, round-faced and healthy-looking, but without the smallest pretensions to beauty, except what could be found in a pair of bright, honest-looking, grey eyes and a fresh, clear skin.

Her teeth were white, but large, and in person she was awkward and clumsy—perhaps the effect of unskilful dressing. Her clothes, which were of common material, were ill-made and soiled with long travel, and, altogether, she was as much out of place in the Chevenix sitting-room as a scullery-maid would have been.

Mr. Chevenix was the first to recover his senses and speak.

"Herbert!" he said. "Is it really you?"

"Really myself, father," the young man replied, holding out his hand, which was not taken, and he recoiled and did not offer it again. "Am I not welcome?" he asked.

"Yes," Gertrude said, eagerly, but no one else spoke for a moment, and then Mr. Chevenix said severely,—

"Such a return needs a little explanation. Who is this?"

"My wife, father."

"That Mrs. Chevenix?"

The tone spoke volumes; and the girl who seemed to have an angry retort ready on the tip of her tongue, which she repressed with difficulty, coloured painfully, but did not shrink from the angry look that the two gentlemen and the elder lady cast upon her.

Gertrude tried not to stare at her, but she could not take her eyes from the strange figure, nor cease wondering whether her brother could have been in his right mind when he gave his name and honour into the keeping of such an extraordinary creature.

"My wife, father," Herbert repeated calmly, "and quite as worthy to bear the name as any Chevenix that ever lived—an honest, good girl, who—"

"Pray say no more!" the elder gentleman returned, passing a scented handkerchief over his face, as if to shut out the sight of his daughter-in-law. "You have doubtless some explanation to offer of such a proceeding as your intrusion in such a disgusting plight. You had better ring the bell, Gertrude, and order rooms to be prepared for your brother and this young person."

"My wife, father, if you please."

"I decline to enter into any discussion on that subject at present!" Mr. Chevenix said, in his most freezing tones. "If you will kindly postpone everything till you are in a fit state to enter the room, I shall be obliged. I presume your luggage has been brought in?"

"We have none," Herbert said, in a hard, bitter tone. "Nothing but what we stand upright in now. Everything that we possessed is at the bottom of the sea. But our adventures will not interest you as much as our personal appearance and the colour of our hands. If you have no welcome for your son, Mr. Chevenix, will you give two penniless wanderers a meal? We will not trouble you for anything more."

Mrs. Chevenix was by the side of her son before he had got out half his speech, with her arms round him, telling him that his father meant nothing—that they were glad to see him; but she spoke no word of welcome to the girl by his side. It was only Gertrude who took her hand, and begged her to come with her; she would find her something to wear, and refreshment.

"I don't want to give you trouble, thank you," the girl replied, stiffly enough. "It is something

to have dry clothes on after what we have gone through. I shall do well enough!"

Gertrude was on the point of saying a gentle word or two which would have set the forlorn newcomer a little at ease at any rate, but her brother spoiled everything by interfering in his most supercilious tones,—

"You had better ring for your maid to attend to the young person," he said, "and Jennings will attend to Herbert. It is impossible to think what can be done till they are a little less travel-stained and disreputable-looking!"

Herbert Chevenix ground an oath between his teeth. He had not expected much in the way of welcome, but he thought he would be at any rate tolerated for as long as it would take to rest and explain.

"You are right, Algernon, as you always are," he said. "My wife and I are hardly fit company for you, or fit guests for my father's house. When I tell you that we came over in the *Hyppatia*, and barely escaped with our lives from that frightful catastrophe, you will understand that we have no gala clothes to wear. We are obliged to ask a shelter and a meal, or we would not do it!"

Mrs. Chevenix gave a great gasp of terror as her son spoke. The wreck of the *Hyppatia* was one of the most terrible catastrophes that had happened for a long time, and it was a wonder that anyone was alive to tell the tale.

"We did not know. Your name was not there!" she said.

"No; we were Mr. and Mrs. James on board," her son replied, quietly. "I did not want to parade the name of Chevenix till we saw what sort of a welcome we received. It is as well now that I did not. We did not write because we intended to keep our arrival a secret till I had made sure of it. We had sufficient means, but the sea has swallowed them with everything else. If you will give us the means of procuring a change of clothes and a meal, we will ask nothing else at your hands. I could not seek the meanest employment as I am now."

His father rang the bell as he spoke, and ordered rooms to be prepared and refreshments sent up to them, and Gertrude went upstairs with her sister-in-law, who had not uttered a word since her entrance into the house, except the few in reply to her offer of assistance. As the door of the room she paused, feeling perhaps that the girl, for she was little more, would rather perform her toilet unaided.

"You will find hot water and a change of clothes laid out," she said. "If there is anything you want or would like, do ring; you will be attended to at once."

She was very sorry for her, and would have liked to say a word or two of comfort and encouragement; but she felt awkward. There was something defiant in the eyes that met hers, and the gentle speech died upon her tongue.

"I will talk to her by-and-by; she will not feel so awkward when she is refreshed. I will leave you to dress," she said. "You will not feel so strange when you come down."

"No, I shall not feel strange," the girl replied, "and I'm grateful to you for condescending to speak to me, though you mightn't think it!"

The door closed upon her, and Gertrude turned away, feeling uncomfortable and constrained. She had expected something very *outré* in Herbert's wife, but this exceeded her very worst fears. She felt there was something in Lena that could not be moulded. There had been a flash of determination in her eyes that spoke volumes.

"Poor Herbert!" she said to herself. "What a fate he has made for himself! Whatever shall we do with her! Papa and Algernon will annihilate her between them, and mamma will smother every kindly feeling, and be cold and hard because they are. I will do my best to be kind to her."

And then she shivered as she thought of Talbot Verney. The arrival of her brother and his very unpromising wife seemed somehow to make her feel very far apart from him; something had come between them of late. He had found so much to take him away from her side. She

would not think of it, things would come right after awhile.

She went to her mother's room. Mrs. Chevenix was hysterical and nervous, upset—as was natural—by the surprise. Gertrude comforted and calmed her as she often did, making her see things in their brightest light, and prophesying that Lena would be made something of when they came to know her; and then she went downstairs to Herbert, who had dressed and looked more like his old self, though sadly worn and aged, and made him understand, as far as she could, that the cold welcome he had received arose more from surprise than anything else. He was slow to believe it, knowing his father and brother as he did.

"I will see how they treat my poor Lena," he said, "before I believe you, you dear little comforter," he said, kissing his sister. "Their greeting just now made me wish we had both gone down in the *Hypatia* rather than entered this house. Where is Lena?"

"Upstairs in the blue room. Suppose you go to her!"

Herbert needed no second bidding. He rushed upstairs to the room she indicated, and lightly knocked at the door. There was no response, and he entered. The room was vacant, and the fresh clothing laid out for Lena to put on untouched.

He looked round in bewilderment. She had mistaken the apartment, doubtless, and was dressing somewhere else; but conspicuously pinned to the drapery of the looking-glass was a note, and the blotting-pad and writing materials had been recently used. The note was addressed to him, and he tore it open and read:—

"DEAR HERBERT,—I am not wanted here! They have let me see that plainly enough. I should die, cooped up here under the eyes of those hard, cruel men, and that haughty woman. What have I done that they should treat me like the dirt under their feet! Don't trouble about me. I have some money in my belt that I meant to have brought out if we were driven to it. Your relations will do for you and help you if you are not trammelled with me. Tell them I won't trouble them. Don't be afraid of my going wrong. I am going straight to a friend, and you shall hear of me. If ever you are independent again—and I know you, you will be—I will come to you, and be what I am now and always have been,—

"Your loving wife,
"LENA CHEVENIX."

"Your sister was good to me. Tell her I will never do anything to shame your name."

Herbert read the letter and stared round him in amazement. Lena was gone, but where and how! She could not have left the house without some of the servants seeing her. His furious ring at the bell brought not only the servants but Gertrude and his mother into the room.

"See, see!" he gasped, putting the letter into his sister's hand. "You might have given her a word, mother! We escaped from death almost by a miracle, and it has come to this—to this!"

And completely broken down by all that had come upon him, he threw himself into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, he burst into tears.

"Don't, dear," Gertrude said, in her gentle voice. "We shall find her; she can hardly be out of the house."

It seemed to her impossible that Lena could have got away without someone seeing her, and Mrs. Chevenix in vain tried to comfort her son, who seemed quite overcome and hardly able to think.

In a very few minutes servants were despatched in all directions in search of the missing girl—both Mr. Chevenix and Algernon, feeling rather ashamed of the part they had played, aiding with all their might in the search. It was all in vain, Lena Chevenix might have sunk into the earth for any tidings they could gather of her whereabouts.

CHAPTER IV.

No one had seen the missing girl leave the house; and, what was more inexplicable still, the *courte*-looking hat that had excited the servants' amusement and astonishment, and the dragged, dilapidated jacket were left behind. She had gone without them, and must have presented a remarkable figure to anyone meeting her.

The day wore wearily on, and Herbert Chevenix, by the advice of the local police, went up to London, and told his trouble at Scotland Yard.

He had begun to fear, in spite of Lena's letter, that she had destroyed herself. The police thought differently, and bade him be of good cheer; she would soon be found.

Giving them instructions to proceed in the search, with his father's name as warranty for the expenses, he went back to the hotel where he had taken up his quarters for the night, to find a telegram awaiting him from his sister.

It was no news of Lena. Some other misfortune had befallen him, of which he could gather little from Gertrude's necessarily few words,—

"Come back by first train in morning. Something terrible has happened. Papa very ill. No news of Lena."

There were no tidings when, after a sleepless few hours in bed, he reached the little station close to his father's house by the earliest train that left London.

Trains stopped there by signal, and he was the only passenger who alighted.

"What is wrong?" he asked of the servant who was waiting for him. "Have they had any news?"

"Not of the lady, sir," the man replied. "Miss Chevenix said I was to be sure to tell you that first. Nothing has been heard at all. It is the master that is very ill. They do say that he can't get better; but I hope it isn't that way."

"What caused it, have you heard?"

"It was some news that came last night, sir. A gentleman from London, they say. Anyway, he was with master some little time, and then the poor old gentleman had a fit, or something. He has never come out of it."

The catastrophe so long expected had come. Ruin was abroad. Bank doors in the City had been besieged by thousands, to whom the closed shutters and barred doors had spoken all too eloquently.

Mr. Daleford and his portmanteau, and the belt that no one but himself knew of were gone, no one knew whither, and the possessions of the Chevenix family were scattered to the winds!

Mr. Daleford's partner, feeling like the head of the firm, but, unlike him, penniless and comparatively innocent, had been the bearer of the tidings to the afflicted household, and he had gone on his way, and got out of the country before the dawn of morning.

He had told Mrs. Chevenix what had caused her husband's illness, and had a stormy five minutes with Algernon Chevenix, to whom the ruin that had come upon the rest of the household would not have much meaning, unless, indeed, it prevented Mrs. Fetterlock from fulfilling her engagement with him.

Herbert felt well-nigh stupid when he was shown into his father's room.

He had feared, in spite of Gertrude's telegram, that his coming home had something to do with the sudden seizure. It was a relief, even in the midst of his grief, to know that it was not the case.

His father did not know him, would never know any one in this world again! The trouble that was to follow the crash would be spared him, and all they could do for him was to watch his ebbing life, and tend him on his brief passage to the grave.

Algernon Chevenix set himself to work to ascertain the real state of affairs, and every paper he touched only seemed to speak of fresh disaster.

It was difficult to imagine any man in his senses so utterly blind to his own interests as his father had been.

He had long known that when the old man

died there would be nothing for him as eldest son to inherit; and he had been content that appearances should be kept up, and their status in the world preserved, without entering too closely into how it was done.

He was horrified when he found that not only what would have come to him, but his mother's money and Gertrude's fortune (a legacy left her by her aunt), had gone with the rest. When his father was gone, they would be absolutely homeless and penniless!

His mother knew nothing. She had left all money details to her husband. Gertrude was as ignorant as she.

It was very hard on him, Algernon thought. He would be saddled with the maintenance of two helpless women, to say nothing of the scape-grace brother, who had come home and brought trouble of his own along with him.

Mr. Chevenix died, and was buried; and still there were no tidings of Herbert's Australian wife; and, except to the family themselves, her odd appearance and subsequent loss seemed very much like a queer dream.

The mourners had hardly time to get back to the house from the funeral before they were besieged by duns, who clamoured in no measured terms for their money.

The unhappy widow and her daughter could give them no satisfaction. They knew nothing of any debts; they believed the lawyer paid all such claims as they became due, and they had no means of satisfying them.

The morning after the miserable day, "The first dark day of nothingness," as Byron calls it, Gertrude was summoned downstairs from her mother's room to see a visitor.

"Tell them I cannot see anyone," she said to the servant who brought the message. She thought it was a repetition of some of the visits of the day before. "Mr. Herberts will speak to whoever it is."

"It isn't one of them, miss. I mean, not that sort of person at all," the girl who brought her the news of the arrival said. "It is a gentleman. He said there was no need to give his name; you would be glad to see him."

"Perhaps I had better come down," Gertrude said, her first thought being not to disturb her mother. "Who can it be?" she thought to herself, little dreaming whose face would greet her when she entered the drawing-room.

"Mr. Verney!" she exclaimed, as a young man, dusty and travel-stained, came forward to meet her, and hold her hand, looking into her face with loving eyes the while, as if he could not sufficiently read her looks.

"Yes," he said. "Forgive me for coming to you like this. I was at Munich when the news of your father's death, and — and what has happened reached me; and I have come straight to you without stopping. Do you know what for Gertrude! Ah! I may call you so, may I not?"

"You are very kind!" she gasped, her heart beating wildly with a passionate joy, for she understood him.

He did love her, then, in spite of her fancies, and he had come in this time of trouble to tell her of it!

"You know what has brought me, do you not?" he said, drawing her to him, and looking into her tell-tale eyes. "I have come to take you away from all this trouble, dear, if you will let me! To ask you to be my wife, Gertrude! — my own darling! I have been holding aloof, I have not spoken when my heart has been eloquent! It will not keep silence now that you are in trouble! Say you will let me claim you for my own! You must know that I love you!"

"I thought so once, my lord!" Gertrude said, in a low tone, and the words seemed to come strangely from her lips. She had hardly ever given him this title before.

No one thought of Talbot Verney as "My lord." He was a genial young fellow that a stiff title did not seem to fit, somehow.

"And believe it now," he replied, looking at her with ineffable tenderness in his dark eyes. "It is the truth."

Gertrude shrank back from him a little, the

whole position flashing upon her. Things she had heard lately took a new meaning now; she had been an unseen third accidentally not many days before at a conversation between her father and Algernon, the whole subject of which was Talbot Verney and his supposed love for her.

She could not make her presence known without a fuss, and she remained where she was, and heard her astute brother explain to their father the reasons for the young man's holding back.

His father was involved; and it was absolutely necessary for the heir to marry money if the estates were to be saved.

The intelligence had come to Algernon Chevenix direct from his own lawyer—who did business also for Talbot Verney's father—and he knew the heiress that was selected as the probable future duchess.

Gertrude had heard and understood, and felt thankful, that the love she felt sure existed had never been spoken.

The Duke was represented as being furious at the thought of his son looking beneath him for a wife, and Miss Chevenix resolved never to give him another thought if she could help it.

She had given him a good many, poor girl! but that was known only to her own heart; and she had tried to think she was glad he was away, and she should never see him any more. And then had come the shock of Herbert's return, and their great trouble; and for a time she had forgotten his very existence.

And he was here, holding her to his heart, and telling her that he loved her above all earthly things, asking her to be his wife, and let him free her from the worry and anxiety that was crushing her to the earth almost.

It was like a glimpse of Heaven to her—the ventilation of all her youthful dreams. And yet, choking back the joy that well-nigh mastered her at the knowledge of his love, she looked him in the face, and said him nay.

"You are very good, my lord," she said, quietly. "I thank you with all my heart, but it cannot be!"

"Cannot!"

"Cannot!" she repeated. "You know it as well as I. You must not think of me. Your father—"

"Will come, in time, to love you as I do," the young man said, vehemently. "Who could know you and not love you? My father has nothing to do with it, my darling!"

"Ah, yes, he has!" Gertrude returned, sadly. "Your duty is to him. You must not marry me. I am no wife for you with all this disgrace hanging over me! Do you know what they are saying of my dead father! Do you know that we shall have no roof to shelter us ere many days are passed! Your father's son cannot marry a beggar!"

"My father's son will do as he pleases!" Talbot Verney said, taking her in his arms as she broke down and burst into tears. "It is for us to choose our own future, not for others to dictate what we shall do with our lives!"

But even as he spoke his heart sank as he thought how entirely, for the present at least, he was dependent on the father whom he was going to disobey, and she shook her head sadly as she saw the shadow that passed over his face.

"You know it cannot be," she said. "It is good of you to have come; we have so few friends in our adversity! We have a double weight of sorrow on us now. Poor Herbert!"

"Ah, yes! I have heard. Can nothing be done to help him?"

"The police say there is nothing but what has been done. We can only wait and hope."

"But we will work too! Something can be done! People do not go amissing like that and never turn up again! Something shall be done! Be my wife, Gertrude, and you will see what mountains will shrink into mole-hills through the might of our great love!"

"No," Gertrude said, sadly but resolutely. "It cannot be, my lord! Poor as I am now and shall be, I will enter no family on sufferance! If your father is willing that you should marry me with all my load of poverty and shame—for it is shame to have a corpse arrested as it leaves the shelter of its old home (and that would have been

done yesterday, but that my brother found out what was intended, and found means to stop the shameful seizure). If you can say honestly that I shall be welcome in your family penniless and disgraced I will say yes, and be your loving wife till death. If not—ah, I need not say any more, I can read it in your eyes! It is no welcome from them you bring me, only—"

"Only a love that will be true to you till death, darling! Only a faithful heart that will die for you if need be! Only a life that will waste itself in your service, and think the guardian of a smile from you ample repayment for all its faith and love! I have tried to tell myself that I did not love you—that you had no love for me! I have wandered far and wide, and you have always been by my side—sleeping and waking! Gertrude, if you say me nay you will make a reckless man of me! Life will be nothing! The future a blank! Gertrude, if you ever loved me speak to me now!"

"I can only repeat what I have said, my lord. I cannot marry you! It would be shameful and wrong of me to do such a thing!"

He would not believe that she was in earnest, and told her she did not love him.

She quivered a little at that, but said never a word.

Then his passion and disappointment overmastered him, and he said bitter things to her, saying she had never cared for him, though she had led him to believe she did by her manner, &c. And finally he went away, vowing that he would never give up the hope of making her his wife.

He was no sooner out of the house than he felt the injustice of which he had been guilty in his violence towards the girl he loved so dearly. He would go back in a day or two, and talk to her again, persuade her to think differently, and to give her consent to what he proposed.

He was not very sure how he was going to keep a wife of whom his father disapproved. But men in love are apt to be sanguine, and look at the future through rose-coloured spectacles.

He went back in less than three days from the time of his interview with Gertrude, to be answered by a rough-looking woman, who announced herself as the caretaker.

The house was to be let and the people were gone, she didn't know where. They had left no address, and "it was her belief they did not want to be found, there were too many after them."

CHAPTER V.

THE waters of oblivion closed as completely over the heads of the Chevenix family as if they had in very deed disappeared from off the face of the earth. All except Algernon, the head of the family now, and he was supposed to be providing for his mother and sister in some retired place on the Continent.

His marriage with the handsome widow, Mrs. Fetterlock Smith, had of necessity been a very quiet affair. The recent death of his father accounted for the non-appearance of his mother and sister at the ceremony, and the bride only shrugged her shoulders and said "poor things," when questioned about them.

Herbert's return was known only to a few in their own circle. The police were *au fait* to all the unsuccessful search that had been made for the missing Lena, but the outside world did not know anything of her existence.

Algernon Chevenix took himself and his wife to Italy, and lived in very comfortable style on their joint means. And the Duke of Malton, passing through Florence, and seeing their names in the notice of some fashionable gathering, paid them a visit.

The Duke was an immensely popular young nobleman—the most eligible part of the season—a little graver and more sedate than Talbot Verney had been, perhaps, but the same genial, warm-hearted fellow as ever.

His father had died within six months of Mr. Chevenix. Almost immediately after his son's visit to Gertrude and her refusal of him he had

been seized with an illness from which he never recovered.

From the day when he went to the house to learn that Gertrude and her mother had vanished, no one knew whither, he had never been able to get any news of her. He was told they were abroad; but whether in any of the colonies or on the continent of Europe no one seemed to know.

Loquing with a friend through Florence he came upon the name of Chevenix, and making inquiries, found it was Algernon.

"Does he live here, I wonder!" he remarked, as he laid down the paper.

"Oh, yes," his friend replied. "I have often heard of him. He is a prig of the first water!"

"Ah, then he hasn't changed much. I don't want him. I want to hear of his family."

"Of the fair Gertrude, eh, Duke!" said his companion, no other than the same Harry Swinton who had once whispered a word of warning into his ear about Gertrude Chevenix.

He had developed into a married man, having carefully sought out a suitable heiress, whose money made up for the fact that she was as empty-headed as a wooden doll, and as plain as she could be without being absolutely ugly.

They were on their honeymoon trip, and her husband had been glad to forget her with his old acquaintance for a little while.

"Of them all," replied the Duke warmly. "I have heard that they are entirely dependent on Mr. Chevenix for a living; and that he is keeping them somewhere in strict retirement. I am going to ask him for their address."

"The retirement is so strict that no one has found out where it is," Mr. Swinton replied.

"If Algernon Chevenix is doing anything for anyone else he is being well paid for it. Something must have been saved from the smash for the ladies if he has anything to do with them."

Mrs. Chevenix was all in a flutter of snobbish delight when the card of his Grace of Malton was brought to her.

She dearly loved a lord, and titled folks had kept her at arm's length at the time of her first husband.

Her second venture had not brought her much more in contact with the great world, for the Chevenix misfortunes had kept Algernon from going much into society after their marriage.

"The visit is not for us, Alida," Mr. Chevenix said, as he looked at the card. "He only wants news of the family."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "I fancy you are wrong there, my dear; the best people have called on us."

"We shall see," replied her husband; and the result proved that he was right.

The Duke was affable to the last degree; just as pleasant and unaffected as Talbot Verney had been; but he made no secret of his object in visiting Mr. and Mrs. Chevenix.

"I am so glad to have found you!" he said to Algernon. "I have been most anxious to obtain your mother's address. I trust she is well! I have inquired everywhere about her, but could get no tidings. Everyone said she was with you abroad somewhere. I am glad to think that Florence is the where, and that I shall have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Chevenix and your sister."

"I am sorry that I cannot oblige you," Algernon Chevenix replied in his very stiffest manner. "My mother does not reside with me."

"I did not imagine that she did. I only want to know where to find her."

"I regret I cannot tell you."

"Not tell me! Do you not know!"

"I do not."

The Duke stared at Mr. Chevenix as if he could hardly believe his ears. He had made all inquiries respecting Mrs. Chevenix and her daughter, and had been assured on all sides that they were under the protection of their son and brother.

He looked round the comfortable apartment, and thought of what he had also heard, namely,

that these unfortunate ladies had no means except what Algernon supplied.

"I hope I have been misinformed as to her circumstances," he said, "and that something was secured to her! I am sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Chevenix; but I was assured that in finding you I should find your mother also."

"Whoever told you that was under a misapprehension," Algernon Chevenix said, in his stiffest manner. "My mother and sister chose to go their own way, and it was not mine. I have held no communication with them since I left England."

"And you do not know what has become of them?"

"I do not."

"Then they have means? I beg your pardon, that is no business of mine, of course. But the thought of two delicately-nurtured ladies like your mother and sister battling with the world alone is terrible to me."

"As my mother chose to go her own way," Mr. Chevenix said, coldly, "there was not the slightest need for any battling with the world as you call it. They both had the offer of a comfortable and suitable home if they chose to accept it. That they did not was no fault of mine."

Talbot Verney's face expressed the disgust he felt. He had not been told by anyone that the offer of a home for his mother and sister had been coupled by Algernon Chevenix with such insulting conditions about keeping out of sight, &c.; that his indignant mother had declared that rather than accept anything at his hands she and Gertrude would work for their bread in the best way they could; but he guessed it, and could not conceal his contempt he felt for the son and brother who could act so.

"I must go elsewhere for information, I see," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me what has become of your brother, Mr. Chevenix?"

"I believe the family are together, wherever they are," was the curt response. "I have no information about them."

"And your brother's wife, is she found?"

"I do not know such a person."

"I will wish you good-morning, Mr. Chevenix," the Duke said, rising. "I have no doubt I shall find the ladies. They must have some friends left who are interested enough in them to know their whereabouts. Good-day, madam."

And without noticing the very elaborate courtesy with which Mrs. Chevenix favoured him the Duke departed.

"Cold-blooded cur!" he said, to himself, when he was out of the house. "I will find them if I set all the detectives in England on their track!"

"Impertinent!" was the remark of Mrs. Chevenix, when he had left the house. "He treated me with no more respect than if I were a shopwoman, or something of that sort."

Her husband did not make any remark; perhaps he thought the Duke's remarks deserved. He did not feel quite comfortable when he thought of them.

Three weeks later he was back in England, and beginning his search for Gertrude Chevenix and her mother with right good-will. He found out how and when they went from their Warwickshire home. The police were in possession of all the facts of Algernon's magnificent offer to his mother and sister; but they had effectually disappeared. It had been no one's business to trace them out when they vanished, and it had not been done.

"It can be taken up now," the intelligent officer who was interviewed by the Duke told him. "If you wish a thorough search made for them."

"It must be privately done," was the reply. "I cannot have their names bandied about in the newspapers, or anything of that sort. They must never know."

"Of course not, your Grace. Everything shall be conducted with the utmost secrecy. Have you a portrait of either of the ladies?"

"No."

"No doubt they could be procured!"

"I am not so sure of that. The late Mr. Chevenix had a strong objection to photographs. He would not allow his family to pose in artist's show-rooms, he said; and it was with the greatest difficulty that any likenesses were taken. Mr. Chevenix will have them if there are any. Has there been any sittings of the younger son's wife. The case was put into the hands of the police, I believe?"

"It was, and nothing ever came of it. I have a theory that the young woman went back to Australia to her friends there. It was an ill-assorted marriage by all accounts; and very likely it has dissolved itself to the satisfaction of all concerned."

"I doubt it," the Duke said. "Herbert Chevenix was not the sort of man to forget the wife he had chosen. I am sure that, wherever she is, he mourns her as sincerely now as when he first lost her—that is supposing that he has not found her."

"I don't know that she has been found. I know we failed to discover her. The only thing we did find out was how she got away from Coombe Langley."

"That was always the puzzle. How did she do it?"

"Put on some bonnet and shawl she found—some servant's, I imagine—and walked quietly out of the house. She found the cab that had brought her there at the village inn, and got inside. The man had driven off before he knew that she had a passenger; and outside the village she stepped him, and bargained with him to take her to an out-of-the-way railway station. A shrewd woman that! And she had money, for she gave him half-a-sovereign to hold his tongue."

"Did the family ever know this?"

"No. We had lost sight of them before it came to light. The man was a disreputable fellow, who was always in trouble, and he got drunk with the money, met with an accident, and finished his career in a Birmingham hospital. It was in the course of another investigation that I came upon the minutes of the case, and heard all about it. I could not get any further intelligence. He could not describe the girl very distinctly; and the clerk at the little station he drove her so had no recollection of her. There was nothing special in her appearance, or the time that she travelled."

"Is it really you, Talbot, you trust?"

"Really myself and no other," and the Duke bent forward and touched the forehead of the white-haired lady who spoke to him with his lips.

She had been a mother to him in his childhood, and his father's valued housekeeper for many a long year afterwards, and the young man loved and revered her far more than most young men do their own mothers.

Mrs. Golding had only left the late Duke's household on her accession to a considerable fortune left her by a brother who had gone to the wilds of Western America, and made money by everything he turned his hand to, as some men have the good fortune to do.

He had left it all to his sister, and made her a rich woman. And her pretty house in Edinburgh was a second home to the young Duke of Melton when he was in the North.

He had not been there for two years, till he appeared suddenly one sunny autumn evening, and startled his old friend almost into hysterics by his arrival. He had met her the previous year, when she had been in London seeking advice for an invalid niece, of whose existence he heard then for the first time, but he had not been in Edinburgh.

"It is like coming home!" he said, seating himself unceremoniously by the old lady's side. "Mamma, dear, why can't you come and keep house for me like you did for the past? Every thing is going wrong, I am sure. And that fine lady I have got to superintend rules me with a rod of iron. I can't say my soul is my own in my own house."

Mrs. Golding laughed—a silvery little laugh very pleasant to hear.

"You never could," she said. "I am too old

now, my boy. And even if I could I have other duties. Oh, I forgot; you have not seen my niece."

She lifted the curtain of a doorway, and led him into another room, where, on a lounge, lay a young lady with a wealth of beautiful hair, through which the setting sun sent golden gleams.

She was not pretty, but the face was full of intelligence, and the grey eyes were fringed with long sweeping lashes that rested on delicate cheeks.

She evinced no confusion at the sight of a stranger, only looking up at him with a pleasant smile.

"Vere is not allowed to sit up or stand yet," Mrs. Golding said. "Otherwise she is quite restored, I hope. But I forget you do not know her. My niece, Miss Schwerin, Talbot. This is the Duke of Melton, Vere—my Talbot that you hear so much about."

CHAPTER VI.

TALBOT VERNEY was oddly attracted by the face of the young lady on the couch. There was something in it that told of a life with a story in it—a wistful expression of expectation or regret about the expressive mouth, and a dreaminess in the eyes that told of sorrow and endurance.

"You will see her up when you come again," Mrs. Golding said, with a smile. "She is to be a prisoner no longer. She faithfully promised not to attempt anything till after to-day, or she would have been up a week ago."

After a few words with Miss Schwerin, who seemed an intelligent, well-informed girl, the Duke and his old friend returned to the sitting-room of the latter, and sat down for a little bit more gossip, as Mrs. Golding put it.

"I forget you are 'his Grace the Duke's' now," the old woman said. "I think of you only as the child that I nursed, and the boy that I reared, and I get hungry for a sight of your face and the sound of your voice. You can spare me a quarter of an hour!"

"I can spare you as long as you like," the Duke replied. "Pat 'his Grace' out of your head, and talk to your boy as you please. I am just as glad to see you, you dear old mamma. Where did you get that wonderful piece of yours from? Why have I never heard anything about her before? Who is she? And what is the matter with her? There, it will take some time to tell me that, and I want to know!"

Mrs. Golding laughed, and told him she was just the same impetuous, inquisitive boy as ever. Miss Schwerin was really her niece, her own sister's daughter.

"Didn't know you had a sister!" the Duke interposed.

"No, dear," she replied, simply. "I never talked about her. Poor Katie, she went wrong and for years we did not know where she was. At last we heard that she had gone to—abroad, that is, and married, and then I corresponded with her till her death. Her marriage was not anything to be proud of, but it was a marriage, and—"

"Yes, I understand," the Duke said. "Don't speak of it. And this young lady is the daughter of that union?"

"Yes."

"And has lost her mother and come home to her auntie! Is that the *denouement* of the story?"

"She has lost both her parents, and has come through sad trials besides. I had no idea she was in England till a hospital nurse came to me one day and asked me to go and visit a poor girl in her charge, on whom a belt containing money had been found, with a letter from me, and one or two other papers besides. I had been found with some difficulty, for I am not a very public individual, and the poor girl was thought to be dying from the effects of a fearful street accident (she had been bewildered by the crowd and bustle, it was supposed, and had been run over). Would I come? I went at last as I could and found my niece, not exactly the niece you see there. She has profited by her long imprison-

ment to become the pleasant ladylike girl you have seen. She was a jewel in the rough when I first brought her home, my poor Vere!"

"And is that all her history?" asked the Duke, with a curiosity he could not repress.

"All for any ears but mine," the old lady said. "If she chooses to tell you anything else when you know her better, she may."

The Duke thought that, somehow, he should hear the story some day, and took his leave after a little more chat, promising to call again very soon. He wanted to see more of Vere Schwerin, and hear all there was to be told about her.

It was a long time since he had been in Edinburgh, and he sauntered through the streets towards Holyrood in an aimless sort of fashion, looking in a dreamy sort of way at all the many places of interest he passed en route, and watching the effects of the dying day in lighting up the marvellous stonework of some of the old houses and towers.

He was almost at the bottom of the Canon-gate, and was picturing to himself what the place could have been like in the days of Queen Mary when it was the fashionable quarter of the city. It was matter for congratulation now that it was a clean, dry evening, for in wet weather it was dirty and unsavoury enough, in spite of drainage schemes and modern improvements.

In the "good old times," the gutters were the recognised receptacles for dirt and abominations of all sorts, and the almost incessant cry of "*Gardez l'eau*," from windows at all altitudes, prefaced the descent of a deluge of whatever household slops wanted disposing of.

Talbot Verney picked his way through the bairns in the gutters and on the pavement, and amongst the filurient tradespeople of all sorts who haunt the neighbourhood, and was just emerging into the freer air and more open space at the bottom of the street, when a few words, spoken in a woman's voice, made him start as if a cannon had been discharged at his ear, and stand rooted to the spot in wondering amazement.

"You may be quite sure of it," a fresh, young voice said, and it was the voice of Gertrude Chevenix. "We will not disappoint you!"

"Aye, folks aye say that," came the reply in querulous tones. "But said bodies like me are nee o' much's account. But my son's coming next Sabbath, and—"

"And you shall have your dress," the younger speaker said.

The listener stood rooted to the spot, wondering where the sounds came from. They were over his head, and there were many open windows in the tenement, from almost all of which came murmurs and household sounds of all sorts.

"How can I find out? How can I know?" he said to himself. "Gertrude, my darling, where are you?"

He almost uttered the words aloud in his excitement, and a woman standing close by him called him a "daff like callant" to her crony, with whom she was gossiping, and brought him to his senses with a cold chill.

"Where is the door to those houses?" he asked one of them abruptly. "How can I get into them?"

"Ye maun just gang up the stair," she replied, looking at him with supreme contempt, as one of the ignorant of the earth, and the other woman pointed to the dark and dingy entry close to which they were all standing.

"You're the stair foot," she said, and he made his way up to the first floor as well as he could.

There were two doors, and he knocked at the first he came to. A woman of sour visage answered his summons.

"Is Miss Chevenix here?" he asked, his voice trembling with excitement and hope. "I heard her voice from the street below, and—"

"Nae frae this house!" was the unpromising reply, and the door was slammed in his face without another word.

He tried the other house, and there came to the door the old woman whose voice he had heard from the street.

"What was ye wanting?" she asked, and he could hardly speak to tell her.

"Miss Chevenix," he said. "She was in your house just now. I heard you talking to her. Excuse me, I do not mean to be rude, and you must think me so, I am sure. Will you let me see the young lady, please? I have been so anxious to find her!"

The old woman stared at him in amazement and a little fright. It seemed to her that he must be mad.

"I dinna ken the name," she said. "It's nae here."

"Yes it is. I was just under the window, not many minutes ago, she was speaking to you. I could not be mistaken in the voice!"

"There has been naeboddy here," the woman replied, "except a bit o' dressmaker lassie, and I dinna ken her name. She is just obliging a frien' o' my ain wi' a puckle wark. She's ill, ye ken, and—"

"But the young lady," the Duke said, in an agony of impatience, "can you tell me nothing about her?"

The old woman shook her head. She could tell nothing except that she had only seen her twice. She was a nice-spoken girl for a dressmaker, and she had heard her name; but was sure it was not Chevenix, nor anything like it. She rather thought it was Smith. She did not know whether she should see her again; she thought probably not.

"But where did she go? Which way did she get out?" the Duke asked, puzzled beyond measure. "I was just under the window, and no one came out into the street!"

"She went down the close likely!" was the reply, and that was all the information that he could get.

The old body gave him the address of the person for whom the young lady had come to her, and he found the house readily enough; but she declined to know anything about the young person inquired for.

She was suspicious of the motive of her visitor, and being a goodly woman, who had brought up her own daughters in the strictest fashion, and taught them to look upon well-dressed young men as ravening wolves, she did not mind telling this especial wolf a fib or two to throw him off the scent.

"I couldna just say," was all the answer that Talbot Verney could get out of her, and he was fain to go away, suffering the tortures of *Tantalus*.

It was Gertrude. He was sure of it, ridiculous as the idea seemed; and he had been so close to her that he could almost touch her, and had not been able to see her.

He went back to Mrs. Golding's, though the hour was a little late for calling upon her by this time. He would tell her all about it and ask her advice; perhaps she might know the grim woman he had just seen, for the house seemed like one, where a respectable business was done.

"Back again!" she said, with a glad look of welcome. "This is good of you; but you look *criste* and tired. What is it?"

"I begin to think I am going crazy, mamma," the young man said, sitting down by her side. "I wonder if you can help me! But where is Miss Schwerin?"

"Yonder," the old lady replied, "in sad trouble;" and she smiled as she spoke.

"Trouble! nothing very deep I hope!"

"Nothing worse than a dressmaker's delay. Tomorrow is to be a grand day with her, and her dress has not come home. It is not the fault of the dressmaker, who is quite a lady. An accident has happened to someone in her employment, and she has not been able to complete it. We have not yet quite given up hope. I know she will send it if it is any way possible."

"A dressmaker again!" said the Duke with a laugh. "I seem to have been amongst the craft to-day!"

He sat with his old friend for a long time and told her of his quest, and all the story of the Chevenix family, and his love for Gertrude.

"I was mean enough to try and forget her when I heard of her father's plight," he said; "and

then, when I found her and asked her to be my wife (for I could no more forget her than I could fly), she would not come unless my father were willing. I could not say that he was, for he was bitterly against the match, and we parted in some anger. I went back two days afterwards to try again, and she was gone. I have been to the eldest brother, the head of the family now, but he disclaims all knowledge of his mother and sister—doesn't seem to care whether they starve or not."

"You are not the only person who has inquired of Mr. Chevenix about his family," Mrs. Golding said. "I should like to find them."

"You!"

"Just so. I have something to say to one of them, at any rate."

"You know them, then?"

"Never saw one of them in all my life that I know of," was the imperturbable reply.

"Enlighten me, you impenetrable old sphinx," Talbot Verney said, full of curiosity, and anxious for any little scrap of information. Perhaps some word that Mrs. Golding might let fall might lead up to an elucidation of the mystery of the family's disappearance.

"I think you are to be trusted!" she said, "and I will tell you. I know Vere will not mind."

"Miss Schwerin!" the Duke said; "does she know them too?"

"Well, hardly!" Mrs. Golding said, "Vere is—"

There was a ring at the door as she spoke, and a colloquy in the hall. A man's voice made itself distinctly audible—a voice that was familiar to Talbot Verney, and yet he could not connect a personality with it. It was a gentlemanly voice, and yet it evidently emanated from a porter, or some one with a parcel.

"Be kind enough to tell the young lady that she will find everything quite finished. Mrs. Smith desires me to say that she regrets exceedingly that there should have been any delay, but—"

The sentence was never finished. The Duke, with his nerves all quivering, was trying to remember where he had heard the voice before, and the servant was listening dutifully to the message, when there was a rustle of drapery from the inner room, where Vere Schwerin was lying on her sofa. A sudden flight through the room of a girl's slight figure, a cry of "Herbert, Herbert!" and then a storm of passionate sobs.

Mrs. Golding rushed to the hall, followed by the Duke, to see the invalid girl fainting in the arms of the young man who had brought the dress. He had shaved off his heavy beard and moustache, and looked pale and fagged; but it was Herbert Chevenix, alive and in the flesh; and this refined-looking girl was the rough bush-wife that his family had spurned and insulted in their brief meeting.

CHAPTER VII.

HERBERT CHEVENIX, for it was he, was like a man in a dream as Mrs. Golding came forward and took the sensible form from his arms, and the Duke caught his hand, and asked him where he had hidden himself all this while.

"I have hidden myself nowhere," he said, putting his hand to his head in bewilderment. "I have been with my mother and sister all the time! Is that Lena? I am in a fog; let me sit down a minute, will you? I have been ill, and I seem all abroad."

Talbot Verney drew him into his old friend's pretty sitting room and put him into a chair, for his face was very white, and he was trembling all over. He looked a different creature from the robust Herbert of former days, who was always too healthy and too strong for strict gentility. He grew better after a minute or two, and looked inquiringly at his old acquaintance.

"I don't understand it," he said. "How did Lena come here? Who is that lady?"

"Her aunt," the Duke replied. "She can explain, I cannot! Something needs explanation all round, but I have found you now, and everything will be clear. I saw her—your sister—this

afternoon. I cannot tell what the sight of her was to me."

"Saw Gertrude! Where?"

"I ought to say heard. I did not really see her though she was so close to me that I could have touched her almost. I made my way into the house, but she was gone. I was told she was a dressmaker, and her name was Smith!"

"So it is," said Herbert, with a smile. "We are all Smiths. My mother is Madame Hoyle Smith, a dressmaker who has a fair business, and hopes to make a competence out of it some day. I am Mr. Hoyle Smith, a sort of man-of-all-work in a big draper's here. I am not a clerk, for I have no knowledge of book-keeping, nor an assistant behind the counter, for I am ignorant of the work there; but I had the good fortune to find a valuable pocket-book dropped by the head of the firm, when I had only been in Edinburgh two days, and he has made me useful. Heaven bless him for it, it was dreadfully low water with us then."

"I can guess it," was the quiet answer. "I have seen Mr. Chevenix, and—"

"Curse him!" said his brother, with much unction. "He would let my mother starve because she will not bury herself in a place of his providing, and account to him for every penny she spends and every minute she occupies in any way. We have done with him."

"He is not much less."

"Mr. Chevenix, come here, please."

The voice of Mrs. Golding calling Herbert put an end to their conversation for the present, and the young man obeyed her summons, and went into the inner room. She closed the door after him, and came to the Duke's side.

"They must explain to one another," she said. "It is all as clear as a book to me. She thought him careless while he has had no means of searching for her, and probably he has thought of her at the Antipodes. Her accident and my interference have helped to prevent their coming together, there is not a doubt of that."

"Tell me where they live!" she Duke said, "I can get there in a few minutes, even if it is any distance in Edinburgh!"

"I can give you the address of my dressmaker," Mrs. Golding said; "but it is rather late to call on her on business. It is past nine!"

"Never mind, they will forgive me. My darling, the night will seem an age; something may happen before the morning."

"Madame Hoyle Smith does not attend to ladies after five in the afternoon," Mrs. Golding said, with a twinkle in her eye. "Perhaps she may make an exception in favour of a gentleman from a distance!"

"I will try. I can tell her what has become of her son! How is it that the ladies have not recognized each other? Mrs. Chevenix—your niece—I mean, saw both the ladies at their own house."

"She did certainly, but under what circumstances! The poor thing was just off a weary journey, had been shipwrecked, and was taken there expecting sympathy, at any rate, for her recent troubles, if not a warm welcome. She got—well, I dare say you know how she was received; her husband was made to feel that he was at home, while she was ignored. Poor, untutored child, she was stung and wounded, and could think of nothing better to do than to run away and come to me. She nearly met her death in doing it, and when I could turn away from her with the knowledge that she might possibly live after all, the Chevenix family had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up!"

"Mr. Chevenix does not hide his light under a bushel," the Duke said, with a smile. "I found him readily enough!"

"I wrote to him," Mrs. Golding said, "and the letter I received made me resolve to keep my place for my own till our lives ended rather than try again to find out her husband. I am a fiery old woman, as you know, and perhaps I acted wrongly, but I learned to love Vere for her own sake (Vere is her second name) and a lonely woman is selfish. I shall lose her now."

"Perhaps you will gain something instead."

If Herbert Chevenix is the bright, warm-hearted lad I knew him of old, I am sure you will. Give me your dressmaker's address, there's a good soul! I must see her to-night."

"I have only seen her twice; the young lady not at all. I had a notion that she stared at Vere as if she had some floating idea in her head about her, but they did not know each other."

She handed the Duke a business card as she spoke, and he looked at it with a queer feeling that everything was unreal, and that he should wake presently out of a dream. It set forth that Madame Hoyle Smith was prepared, with the help of competent assistants, to undertake dressmaking of any description, and all the usual intimations of a modest announcement.

"She lives over her workroom," Mrs. Golding said, "in a quiet way. No one ever penetrates up there; but I believe all her capital, whatever it was, has gone in furnishing the business part of the house. It is very nice and elegant."

Still feeling as though he were dreaming Talbot Verney made his way to the part of the old city indicated on the card. It was no fashionable thoroughfare, no business quarter of the town, but just a terrace of houses not far from Allan Ramsay's old home, quiet and respectable; and here "Madame Hoyle Smith" had set up her dressmaking room. She was making her way, there was no doubt of that; but it was a struggle still, and the little servant-girl who opened the door with much wonderment and caution—for it was a late hour for the simple household to have visitors—was all that could be afforded at present. The house contained two flats, the lower one being devoted entirely to the business, and containing two workrooms, and a show-room further up to which no one but the family ever penetrated.

The rustle of a dress made itself heard on the dark staircase as the girl opened the door, prepared to parley with the visitor—for the young person was hardly reliable though she was clean and neat to look at in the matter of messages and door answering.

"Yes," and the voice that spoke made Talbot Verney's heart leap till he could hardly speak.

"Yes, mum."

"Say that Madame cannot see anyone at this hour. Between ten and four any day."

"I think Madame will see me!"

It was not anywhere in the little maid's programme that a tall man should stride past her into the house; and when this happened she was too much astonished to do anything but gasp out a scared,—

"Oh, my!" and stand, staring, while the stranger rushed to the foot of the inner stairs, and called after her young mistress,—

"Gertrude! My darling, have I found you at last!"

It was more amusing still to find her very presence forgotten, while the gentleman clasped "Miss Smith" in his arms as if he would never let her go, and kissed her too, while her mistress came out of her room and demanded an explanation of the unwonted confusion. Then they all disappeared upstairs into the family sitting-room, and the girl heard sobs and wondering exclamations, and built up a three-volume romance on the spot.

There was not much to say. Talbot Verney's joy was too great for many words, and Gertrude had been taken too completely by surprise to deny her extreme delight at the meeting.

"I am not going to be said 'nay' to this time!" the Duke said, with his arm round Gertrude's waist, and his other hand clasping that of Mrs. Chevenix. "I told her long ago that I would never give her up, and I never will!"

"But your Grace cannot marry a dressmaker!" Gertrude said, looking at him shyly, but with marvellous love in her pretty eyes.

"My Grace is going to do just as I please!" he replied. "You have not asked me yet how I came to find you out. When you were talking to that old woman at the bottom of Canonsgate today I was under the window!"

"You!" Gertrude said, in amazement.

"Whatever were you doing there? It was at that

old woman's that I went to for that Mrs. Gidden. You didn't want me to go, mamma, dear; but see what has come of it!"

"Yes, see," the Duke said, boldly, taking the blushing girl in his arms and embracing her, "if I had not heard her dear voice in that queer old house I should not have gone to Mrs. Golding with my troubles and encountered Herbert there."

"Do you know Mrs. Golding?" asked Mrs. Chevenix, in amazement. "Is all this a queer dream, I wonder? Talbot, I can't believe that you are here! I beg your pardon—your Grace, I should say!"

"I hope I shall never be anything but 'Talbot' to you, dear lady!" the young man said, affectionately. "Of course I know Mrs. Golding. She is the dear old soul you have heard me talk of before now, who filled a mother's place to me when I was a child, and took care of my father afterwards. I went to her with my troubles. She could not help me; but Herbert came while I was there, and—but he shall tell his own story when he comes back."

"I can't think what is keeping him!" Mrs. Chevenix said, anxiously. "My poor boy! He is a good son and a brother, Talbot! He has been very ill, and we thought we should have lost him; but we have met with friends. His employer has been very kind. We have passed through some very dark days since we saw you, but—"

"But the bright ones have come, for Herbert as well as for you!" the Duke said, with a smile. "He will be a different man when he comes back to-night."

"He will be very tired!" his mother said. "Poor boy, he cannot get over his wife's desertion. There does not seem much doubt that she went back to Australia. She was traced to a ship that was just starting. She must have been a heartless, unworthy creature, though he believes in her still. The police had not much difficulty, after all, in finding out where she had gone. We had tolerably sure information."

"The police are not always right; they were wrong in this instance."

"Wrong!"

"Just so."

"How do you know?"

"Because I have seen her within the last hour. She never went out of England. She is with her nearest relative, my dear old nurse; but she will tell you all about it when Herbert brings her home. He is with her now."

"With her! Here in Edinburgh!"

"Here in Edinburgh. She is Miss Vere Schwerin, the young lady to whom he carried home the dress. She has been here some time, never dreaming she was so close to the husband she had sorrowed for so long."

(Continued on page 160.)

HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY

—10—

CHAPTER VII.

FLORA TRAVANION hurried out of the room not knowing in the least where she could find the others. She passed numbers of men lounging about the corridors, who all looked at her with interest, most of them resolving to ask for an introduction before the evening was over.

Shy but eager she ran up the stairs, waiting for an instant to lean over the balustrade which ran round the gallery at the top, and watch the animated scene below.

One man, with a dark, keen face, caught sight of the graceful figure, and fixed his eyes upon it with open, almost insolent, admiration, till becoming aware of it suddenly, she drew back like a frightened rabbit, and hurried towards the bedrooms.

Mrs. Madden met her, looking thoroughly puzzled and bewildered, and taking her under her motherly wing, opened one door after another till she found the room in which the Miss Willoughbys were smoothing out their tresses for

the further enchantment of their future partners.

"Oh, here you are!" cried Jenny, in delight as she stood before the looking-glass eyeing her own buxom figure with evident satisfaction. "I positively can't raise my hands to my head without cracking my sleeve, and I've been dying to put my flowers in," holding out a spray of pink geranium and maidenhair fern, and dancing with impatience on the tips of her toes.

Florence took the flowers, and inserted them carefully amongst the fluffy curls, which, as Miss Jane Willoughby thought, showed off her beauty to the best advantage.

She bobbed her head right and left just like a sparrow, wondering if they weren't just one little bit too high, or perhaps, rather too much to the left, till Emily told her sharply that she couldn't wait for ever, and she wanted Flora to see after her.

Miss Trevelyan opened her eyes when Emily put a tiger-lily into her hand and requested her to adjust it.

"But isn't it too large?" her eyes twinkling with amusement, as she contemplated the flower in amazement.

"No, Edgar Winder says that nothing can be too monstrous. He was at a ball in London only the other day, and he saw a lady with a water-lily on the top of her head nearly as big as a soup-plate."

"That decides it, of course," the corners of her mouth twitching. "Mr. Winder's taste is beyond suspicion."

Emily looked cross.

"You always sneer at the poor fellow, because you can't get over his not admiring you. I think he is one of the pleasantest people here."

"I suppose so, as you talked to him the whole afternoon. Do you really think you can wear it?" trying to pin it down so that it should nestle as much as possible.

"Of course I can. It looks uncommon, just as he said it would," turning and twisting as her sister had done before her. "He wanted me to look different to the rest, said he was tired of roses, and all that sort of thing. By-the-bye, where are yours?" turning sharply upon her, as if she had been a detective ready to pounce.

Where were they? For a moment she could not recollect, but the next it flashed across her that she had left them in Sir Basil's hands, and a scorching blush rose to her cheeks.

"I—I dropped them downstairs."

"Gave them away I should say by the look of your face. Really, Flora, I don't think mamma would approve of such a thing," and Emily pursed up her mouth.

"Don't you! I didn't ask her," with a flash of her large dark eyes.

"I didn't even give a rosebud to Frank Rivers, although I am sure he hinted for it," and Jenny gathered up her fan and gloves with an air of the strictest propriety.

"And I have never given a flower in my life to anyone," throwing back her head, "and I don't suppose I ever shall. Are you ready?"

"Are you? You haven't put anything in your hair," with a deprecating glance at the small pearl star which glistened amongst the glossy brown curls, and which Emily thought was frightfully insignificant compared with her own tiger-lily.

"No, I haven't time; and it doesn't matter. Come along."

"You are in a marvellous hurry. Pray, is Sir Basil waiting at the bottom of the stairs?"

Flora marched out of the room with her head in the air. The shaft had been sped at random, for Emily was quite unaware of the long *tête-à-tête* in the octagon room. Possibly if she had known of it she would have made the remark even stronger, but she did not guess the suffering she had inflicted on the girl's delicate organisation, and chuckled to herself at the success of her little joke, as she tripped along, calling to Jenny to keep up.

The magnificence of the place struck both the sisters with awe, and they could not help feeling Flora Trevelyan as a sort of protectress, because she was accustomed to the house from having stayed there.

Mrs. Willoughby was standing with a group of ladies by the drawing-room door as the girls came through the hall. She turned round with a smile to her daughters.

"So here you are at last! The collation is quite ready, but Sir Basil kindly said that I had better gather my flock before he gave the signal for anyone to move into the dining-room."

"I quite forgot dinner!" exclaimed Flora, her face lengthening, for she had made such haste over her toilette in order to be down in time to watch over her brother whilst being moved into the drawing-room.

"Yes, my dear, to-day you forget most things," severely, in a tone that brought a bright colour in the girl's cheeks, and made Lady Rivers look surprised. "I am glad to find that youth can be forgetful as well as old age," she said, graciously, for Miss Trevelyan's high-bred air pleased her fastidious taste. She at once made up her mind that the solicitor's wife tyrannised over her husband's ward, and resolved to extend her favour to a lovely girl who would be an ornament to the large lofty rooms at Rivercourt. "Allow me to make acquaintance with you, my dear. I knew your poor father better than most people, and I think he would like me to know his child."

Flora stretched out an eager hand at once, for any kind allusion to her father would have made her on friendly terms with a chimney-sweep's wife; and the Willoughbys were quite dismayed at her ease of manner when talking to a lady who was supposed to hold her head so high that she could not see those of inferior rank. Sir Basil Fan's dark eyes lit up with pleasure, as he came forward to offer his arm to Lady Rivers.

"I think we are all assembled."

A tall form hurried across the room. A fair head bent before Flora Trevelyan. A familiar voice said, entreatingly,—

"May I?"

The next moment they were following in the wake of a long string of guests, for Frank Rivers was determined to leave a wide interval between his companion and his host.

"So very flattering of Sir Basil!" Mrs. Willoughby took care to explain to the portly gentleman who was taking her into dinner. "Nothing would induce him to go into the dining-room before my girls made their appearance."

"Does he know anything of them?" thinking to himself that the Baronet was easily pleased, if he had already fallen a victim to the Miss Willoughbys' attractions.

"Not so very much, but then it was all the nearer of him, I suppose," lowering her voice as she paused in helping herself to some mayonnaise. "A barrister naturally feels drawn to one of his own profession."

"Ah! he'll forget all that now, forget that he ever sat in Lincoln's-inn hungering for the brief that went next door. Looks clever, though. Expect if he didn't do much it was his own fault!"

"But who says he didn't?" agitated at such an aspersion on her paragon.

The Squire chuckled.

"Ever seen his name in the paper? Ever known him to be connected with any trial that was ever heard of?"

"Well; no," she admitted, reluctantly; "but some people have a cross against their name appearing in the *Times*!"

"A barrister would be crazy if he objected!" said Mr. Thornton, drily.

"Well, you can't say that of Sir Basil!" with a triumphant smile.

"Something queer about the man," in a low voice. "Do you notice, he never laughs?"

"Perhaps he has nothing to laugh about!"

"Heaven preserve me from a long-faced fellow who has nothing on earth to laugh about!" exclaimed the Squire, energetically. "I'd avoid him as I would a pest!"

"But why?"

"Because low spirits are as catching as small-pox. Ha! ha! you look as if I had astonished you!" and his jolly face beamed with amusement.

"I really thought you meant to inter—" began Mrs. Willoughby, gravely.

"I! Nothing was further from my thoughts. I never infer anything," with a mischievous smile. "For instance, with that young Rivers before my eyes, forgetting his dinner for the sake of Trevelyan's girl, I don't even infer that he's spoony. There, what do you think of that?"

"Nothing; because Mr. Rivers has known my girls from their cradles, and he has only got friendly with Flora because she is living with us."

"Humph! In my day we didn't wait for a reason before we went head-over-ears!" and the Squire laughed again, whilst Mrs. Willoughby looked annoyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR all the remaining years of her life Flora Trevelyan looked back on that evening of the First of June, as one of the happiest in her life. She was a girl still, with all the hopes of youth already budding in her innocent heart, with bright eyes looking forward to the joyful promise of the future. In all the sorrows of her life there had been nothing to turn into bitterness the natural sweetness of her disposition. She had lost her father and mother, and she and her brother had been left with few of this world's goods to bless themselves with; but there was no dishonour in their present poverty.

Their father was a generous, high-minded honourable man. He had not made money by defrauding the widow and fatherless, nor had he brought anyone else down with the crash of his ruin. No stain rested on his memory, no shame was upon his children's head. They could go forth fearlessly into the world, sure that no stone would be thrown at them for any wrong-doing of their father's.

"Tell me, Miss Trevelyan," and Frank Rivers lowered his voice so that his question could not be heard by the rest of the guests at the long table, "why did you give your roses to that man?"

"Why shouldn't I?" with a smile about the corners of her mouth. "That man, as you irreverently call him, is my host, and I am sure he would give me some more if he knew I hadn't got any."

"His whole gardenful, of course," huffily. "No, because that would leave none for other people."

"Does he care about other people? Strikes me that he would go his own way, and give away his head if he chose, without bothering about the general public."

"I think he would do what was right, whatever other people said," thoughtfully.

"O! what was wrong, if it suited him better."

"Why do you dislike him so?"

"I never said I did," his fair face flushing.

"Just look at him now. He's as obstinate as a pig. He would go straight at a wall rather than turn to the right or left. You can see it in his face."

"Isn't that grand? Isn't it better to go straight at a thing, never mind what obstacles get in your way," her eyes looking bright and eager, like those of a young soldier making for a breach at the head of his men.

"Depends upon the thing," drily, "and your way of getting to it."

"I suppose so," with a low laugh. "If I were in the garden and wanted a cup of tea, it would be better to go round by the door than crash through one of the drawing-room windows, supposing it was shut."

"And when I'm captain, and dying to be a major," he rejoined, with a smile, "it would be better to wait or exchange into another regiment than administer a dose of arsenic in order to get the fellow out of my way."

"Well, I suppose so, if you don't wish to join the majority by means of the gibbet"; her eyes twinkling.

"Is that a joke—an execrable pun?"

"Certainly not, a wholesome warning."

"Warning not needed. I was pointing out to you the dangers of your doctrine."

"Still, I like a man with a firm will," nodding her young head resolutely.

"And a fine property!" looking down into her face, and wondering which she would prefer—the Abbey or Rivercourt.

"I should like him just as well if he were a pauper!"

"Would you take him tea and tracts when lodged in the workhouse?"

"I'd take him tea and tobacco, which he would like much better."

"And trust his soul to the chaplain?"

"Certainly. Why should I preach to him, because I happened not to be quite so unfortunate?"

"Preach to me; I should like it," lips and eyes smiling together.

"I might have given you a lecture on bad temper an hour ago," with a mischievous glance from under her dark lashes.

"Certainly not," his face clouding. "It was enough to make any fellow in no end of a rage. Even Mrs. Willoughby was furious."

"She was cross and fussy because she couldn't find me," the colour deepening in her cheeks; "but you had no right to bother yourself about me."

"I didn't ask for a right," his fresh young voice vibrating. "I don't care a hang if I had it or not, but I shall bother myself about you, whether Fane likes it or not."

"You are very good," with quiet dignity, though the hot blood rushed over neck and face. "I don't see what he has to do with it."

"No more do I," eagerly. "He hasn't as much right as I. We are old friends, you know," with as much pride in his tone as if he were claiming friendship with a Plantagenet.

"He saved Eustace's life; I can never forget that," her eyes softening with the remembrance, as she cast a glance towards the head of the table.

Sir Basil was talking gravely to his next-door neighbour about some troublesome tax which had caused general discontent, but he caught the glance, and one of his rare sweet smiles flitted across his handsome face, transfiguring it like a sunset on a rugged moor.

"Curse him," muttered Rivers, under his yellow moustache. "I wish I had been there, and he had never set foot in this place. Mark my words, Miss Trevanion—"

But as to what she was to mark was left in doubt, for there was a general pushing back of chairs preparatory to a move into the drawing-room.

When once the conversation stopped Flora's thoughts were concentrated on her brother, and to Rivers' chagrin she dropped his arm as soon as she crossed the threshold.

Where was he! She looked right and left, but she could see him nowhere.

Pleats of eager eyes met hers, but not the pair which at present was all the world to her.

How much longer he would engross her affection was doubtful, for she had already reached the time of life when love and lovers take up the thread of existence, and brothers are generally sent to the wall.

The two sisters looked after her with disparaging glances, and their mother remarked, "Flora is so dreadfully independent!" but there was nothing forward in the girl's bearing as she threaded her way quietly through the crowd, utterly unconscious of the interest she was exciting as her lovely eyes searched in vain for Eustace Trevanion.

"What are you looking for?" asked Sir Basil, in the deep voice that always sent an unaccountable thrill through her whole being.

"Can't you guess?" she said with a smile, somehow feeling sure that the question was unnecessary.

"Of course I can. I only asked as a matter of form. You won't find him here. He is in the ball-room. I know he would like to watch the dancing, and one move was enough for him."

"I suppose I may go to him?" shyly.

"I suppose you may do what you like in my house," he answered with a smile, "but before

you ferret him out come to the conservatory. I owe you some flowers for the roses you gave me."

"I didn't give them," quickly.

"I think you did. Come!"

"No, I don't care about having any more,"

nervously, feeling, she scarcely knew why, a sudden dislike at receiving anything from his hands.

"I want to go to my brother."

"And I want you to come with me," grave, but very resolute.

Frank's words came into her head, "a mad who would go straight at a wall rather than turn to right or left," and she made up her mind at once that she would show there was one girl who would not yield her will to his.

She turned hastily away towards the door of the ball-room, as if she paid no attention to his remark, but she was like a frightened hare resisting the fascination of a boar constrictor.

The serpent lets its victim loose for a short time, knowing that he is certain to win at the last; and Sir Basil, apparently yielding to her wish, drew her small hand through his arm and led her in the wished-for direction.

But when she was near the open folding doors, and could see the splendid room lit up with myriads of lights and adorned with a wealth of roses, he turned sharply to the left, and before she knew where she was going, she found herself standing in the dim light of the conservatory.

Alone amongst the flowers with Sir Basil Fane!

"Now which rose will you have?" looking down at the fresh young beauty with a gleam of triumph in his usually earnest eyes.

She would not look up at him, but cast her eyes on the ground, whilst her lips went into what the man who was watching her thought a delicious pout.

"Not one, thank you."

"But you must. Here, take your choice. I don't know their names, but they are supposed to be the finest in the country. Aren't they good enough for Miss Trevanion?"

"They are lovely, but I don't want them," drawing up her neck rebelliously.

He picked a lovely "Cloth of Gold" and held it out to her.

She shook her head.

His face grew stern, almost forbidding.

"You must and you shall!"

He stood glowering down at her, aware for the first time that she meant to defy him, wondering why it was that he, a hardened man of the world and a saddened one as well, could care so much about a girl's whim.

Then a sudden thought came into his mind. He bent his head, and his voice softened.

"Have you forgotten, Flo?" a passionate reproach in the simple words.

In an instant her face changed. She remembered all she owed to him and was aghast at her own want of gratitude. Her eyes swimming with tears, her breast heaving, she held out her hand.

"I—I didn't mean it."

A smile came over his face, but a slight trace of the evil temper which she had roused could be seen behind that smile. He was conscious that he had conquered, but he did not choose to have such a scene repeated.

"No," he said, in answer to her gesture, more than to her words, "you despised it."

And the next moment the rose in all the perfection of its beauty was crushed on the floor under the heel of his boot.

Was it an emblem of what she herself would be in the far-off days of the future.

He was dressed for the first time for weeks, in evening dress, with a low waistcoat and a wide expanse of finest shirt-front, his white tie in the neatest of bows, a colitaire of simple gold and a watch-chain of a rigid pattern his only ornaments.

Sir Basil Fane threw a Turkish shawl over his long legs to add, as he said, a touch of the picturesque to his appearance, and then went away without a word or a look to his sister.

"Oh, my darling! How did you manage to get dressed! Are you sure it wasn't bad for you?"

"Not a bit of it; Graham, Fane's own man, helped me. I only wish I had him at The Firs. I always said I ought to have somebody specially to look after me."

"But really Winter does very well, and you know Mr. Willoughby arranged for him to wait upon you only to spare us expense," in the soft tone which she always used to her invalid brother.

"Rubbish! I know we've plenty of money if we could only get at it. But here they come," raising himself on his elbow, and gazing at the crowd of incoming guests with boyish pleasure. "Who's that swell with the diamond star?"

"Lady Rivers. And, oh! Estace, she knew papa."

"Did she?" his eyes brightening. "Then she knows we are a cut above the rag-tag and bob-tail."

Up came Frank Rivers, anxious as young men generally are to be attentive to the high-society of the girl they specially admire. Whilst he was talking to Eustace, and chaffing about the swell he looked reproving on his velvet cushions, Flora was carried off by a partner.

He looked round intending to claim her, and found to his disgust she was gone.

"There is such a pretty girl over there," said Sir Basil. "Why don't you dance with her?"

"Miss Fothergill!" looking across the room to where she was sitting by her mother's side waiting for the partner who apparently hesitated to come. "She doesn't care about me, and I want to talk to Trevanion."

"Go and see if she won't care for you," said the host, with a smile. "You can't have too many people in love with you at once."

Rivers laughed, pleased as men always are at a compliment to his own fascinations, and walking across the room made his bow.

As soon as the dance was over he resolved that he would pounce upon Flora; but he had the pleasure of being blocked in a doorway with his present partner, whilst he could see the one he was longing after surrounded by a ring of men who were being introduced to her by her host, and who were inscribing their names on her card in rapid succession.

He cursed his own stupidity for not having scoured her before, knowing that she was the sort of girl to leave a blank unasked.

He was young enough to feel his disappointment acutely, and not old enough to hide it, and for half the evening leant against a wall or stood in a doorway meditating over his wrongs.

Not that he was sentimentally inclined, only ever since he first found her out he was disposed to look upon Flora as his own property, and was much disgusted when the new man, this unknown baronet, seemed to dispute the matter with him.

"Don't you dance?"

The question was asked of Sir Basil by Philip Fane, a man with a pale, thin face, with keen eyes and a small dark moustache. He was something like a bad likeness of his cousin, with all the best part of his expression left out, and with the worst intensified.

Sir Basil started, for at that moment he was engrossed by watching Flora dancing with Rivers, who had won her for a partner at last, and looked thoroughly content with his prize.

They were a handsome pair, well-matched, as he could not help confessing. A craving desire, however, came upon him to stop the waltz, and all at once it seemed to him a monstrous thing that a modest girl should think

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW minutes later she stood by the side of the velvet couch on which her brother was lying, looking down into his face with the old affection in her eyes, but a strange furtive in her breast.

Eustace Trevanion looked particularly attractive, his fair head resting on a crimson pillow, his delicate face flushed with a new excitement.



SHE STOOD, LOOKING DOWN INTO HIS FACE WITH ALL THE OLD AFFECTION.

it permissible to go round the room with a man's arm round her waist. He answered his cousin shortly,—

"No, I don't make a fool of myself, except when I can't help it."

"I shouldn't mind making a fool of myself if the girl were half as pretty as that Miss Trevanion," he said, slowly, putting his eye-glass in position in order to study Flora's face the better as she passed. "You must introduce me when the dance is over."

"She is too simple to suit your vitiated tastes."

"Not if she gets on with you," a cynical smile curving the tips of his moustaches. "Is she to be mistress of the Abbey?"

A dark frown drew his brows together. His eyes were still fixed on that small head with the pearl star glittering amongst the coils of rich brown hair, as he answered, gravely,—

"No, the Abbey will never have a mistress in my time."

"Not! Really!" with an eager look into his face, to see if he were speaking in earnest. "You must be joking. A pauper swears he won't marry because he doesn't think he will have the chance; a millionaire takes it as his natural fate."

"I'm not a millionaire. I think these men will play this waits for ever. I had better stop it, and suggest a change."

He stepped forward with the intention of going up to the band, but stopped on seeing Flora Trevanion and Frank Rivers pass through the open window on to the starlit terrace.

"After all," he said to his cousin, "I don't see why I should interfere; the people seem to be enjoying themselves. If you want an introduction to Miss Trevanion come at once, or I shall forget it."

"But where is she?" looking round the room at the flitting crowd. "I've lost the beauty."

"In the garden."

"Then she won't want us. She will hate me

for ever if we interrupt a flirtation," hanging back, as his cousin moved towards the nearest window.

"There is no flirtation. They are old friends. Mrs. Willoughby was telling me all about it just now."

"I don't know Mrs. Willoughby, but I do know a flirtation when I see one. However, it is you who will get into hot water, and not I," following him out into the garden, muttering to himself,—

"I believe he's hit already; I must keep my eyes open."

Meanwhile, the couple they were seeking were standing under the shadow of a willow, which bent gracefully forward, as if making a reverence to the dewy lawn.

"A shooting-star!" exclaimed Flora. "Wish! wish! before it's too late!"

"Did you?"

She nodded.

"Shall you be happy if you get it?"

"Perfectly."

"I can't flatter myself that it had anything to do with me!"

"No, you can't," a smile hovering on her lips.

"But mine had with you," looking down into her face, and thinking he had never seen anything prettier.

"But you hadn't time to make a wish—I'm sure of that."

"I had got it all ready. I'll tell mine, if you'll tell yours."

"It won't spoil the charm!" anxiously.

"It will add to it," with a joyous laugh at the thoughts he had in his head. "Yours first."

A gentle gravity stole over her face; and her voice was low, as if she were talking of a prayer.

"I wished that Estace might be quite well; just like other people."

"I hope he may, with all my heart," said Rivers, sincerely, his kind heart touched by the sister's devotion, although he could have wished

that some of it should have been turned in another direction. "And I wished," his own voice sinking, unconsciously, as he watched her intently, to see the effect of his words, "that when I come back from India—"

"Miss Trevanion, my cousin begs for an introduction—Mr. Philip Fane—Miss Trevanion!"

Sir Basil's voice cut ruthlessly through his sentence, and the young man's wish was known only to his own breast.

Philip Fane bowed low, as he always did before a beautiful woman, and as he bowed he formed a resolution, in the depths of his selfish heart, that one day he would be master of Greylands, with Flora Trevanion for his bride, if he ruined Sir Basil's life, and broke the young soldier's heart on his way.

As Frank Rivers drove home that night, on the back of his mother's landau, his eyes fell on the topmost words of the yellow placard,—

"MURDER!—£1,000 REWARD!"

plainly visible for all men to read in the ghostly moonlight, and he turned from it with a shudder.

"If I were Sir Basil I'd tear that vile thing down."

"Yes," said Lady Rivers. "It is enough to give the poor man a nightmare."

(To be continued.)

Sudden changes and dangerous wind-storms occur wherever the barometer falls suddenly from a medium height through from one-half to three-fourths of an inch during a few hours.

A new range finder has just been invented which, it is said, is a great improvement on all range-finders now in use. The distance of any object can be ascertained by a mere glance through the instrument, it being shown on a little dial the moment the object is focused.



"FORGIVE ME, JOHN!" SHE MOANED, BUT HE SHOOK HER OFF IMPATIENTLY.

CAN YOU BLAME HER?

—107—

CHAPTER VIII.

EVERY fibre of Freda Armitage's nature revolted from the parts she had agreed to play. Simple, earnest, true, it went against her very instinct to deceive her old playfellow—to assist in any way at what might bring one trouble upon them; but Freda's was a very tender heart, a very pitying disposition. When Sir John's wife put her arms around her and pleaded with her for aid she could not refuse it.

"I must go to London," Lady Hyacinth had cried; "what is dearer to me than life is in danger."

Freda could not doubt her truth. The dread anguish in the lovely eyes, the mute, despairing agony of the young wife's face told too well how real was her trouble, and Freda yielded; and only when the fair, girlish mistress of The Elms had left her husband's home did what she had done come home to Miss Armitage in all its force.

In truth there was no easy task. From the very first her mother and sister had resented their hostess's preference for her. They had affected not to care for Sir John's wife, but they would have been very glad to fill Freda's place in her regards. With their inquisitive eyes upon her Hyacinth's confidante had indeed a pathway full of difficulty.

"Is not her ladyship coming?"

They had sat down to luncheon. The footman was in attendance; the butler had taken up his position, but their fair young mistress was not present. The men hesitated, and poor Freda took the answer upon herself.

"Lady Hyacinth is not well to-day. She begged we would excuse her."

"And she is all alone," remarked Alice, spitefully. "As you are so intimate, I wonder you did not offer to sit with her, Freda!"

The servants detected the second Miss Armitage.

The butler, a demure elderly individual, spoke up in Freda's defence.

"My lady is subject to neuralgic headaches, ma'am," he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Armitage; "when she's one of them she can't bear a creature near her. She has even sent away her maid. She told the girl she wanted nothing but rest."

"The worst plan in the world," said the widow, fretfully; "there's nothing like food for neuralgia. Some of that chicken now and a glass of champagne would do her all the good possible."

The man shook his head.

"I couldn't take it on me to disobey her ladyship, ma'am. Lady Hyacinth's orders are that she is not to be disturbed until she rings her bell."

Lunch progressed through its weary courses. Mrs. Armitage and Alice had excellent appetites; Freda felt as if each mouthful would choke her. Never before had any meal appeared to her of such endless length. Her mother made repeated allusions to the absent hostess, and at last to quiet her, Freda allowed herself to be the bearer of a glass of port wine and a biscuit. She despatched herself for the delect, but it seemed forced upon her by the presence of circumstances.

Hyacinth had given her the key of her bedroom. She placed it in the lock, turned it, and went in, taking care to bolt the door after her. She deposited the wine and biscuit on the table, and then she sat down to while away the time she would be supposed to spend in talking to Lady Hyacinth.

There was something intensely dreary and deserted about the room—no pretty disarray of jewels and lace, no elegant confusion of trifles on the dressing-table. Everything seemed in prim order save a piece of white paper which was fluttering on the ground, and seemed out of keeping with the stiff precision of the chamber. Without a thought of harm Freda raised it. That it was a letter never dawned upon her.

She absolutely never dreamed of such a thing until her eyes fell on these lines:—

"... The doctor gives no hope. If you would see him again you must come at once."

The paper was but a fragment, yet it was enough to set Freda thinking. Who was this strange mysterious "He"? She knew that Lady Hyacinth had no brother, that her father was abroad. Who, in all the world, could have such a claim upon Sir John's young wife as to make her hurry to their bedside unknown to her husband?

Miss Armitage put the scrap of paper into her pocket. She meant to restore it to its owner. She had sat nearly half-an-hour in the deserted room. Surely that was long enough for her supposed errand! She had risen to go, when a gentle rap came at the door.

Freda started. She had never trembled for herself as she trembled then for Hyacinth. Never in all her life had she felt such a burden of terror, anxiety, and perplexity as assailed her now. Her knees shook, so that she could hardly stand.

The knocking was repeated—a little louder, a little more persistently. Hardly knowing what she did, Miss Armitage went towards the door.

"Who is there?"

She had no idea what answer she expected; but no voice could have been less welcome to her than that which replied,—

"I—let me in, Freda. I want to know what is the matter with Hyacinth."

Cold as marble grew the unfortunate confidante of Hyacinth's flight. Was ever fate so cruel! Had ever things gone so adversely?

According to all expectation and belief Sir John Carlyle would not have been home for another four hours, and now here he stood at the door of his own bedroom demanding his wife.

"Come, come," he repeated, as poor Freda still delayed to answer him, "you are making me terribly uneasy. Open the door at once and let me see for myself what ails my wife."

His hand was on the door. Clearly resistance was useless. Freda unlocked the fortress, with no more idea of how to answer the intruder than the little child upstairs in the splendid nursery.

Sir John entered hastily. "What did you mean by keeping me in suspense?" he cried, reproachfully; "the butler declares my wife is too ill to leave the room. Your mother says she has touched nothing. I am going to send for the doctor."

"I am sure she would not wish it."

"She never thinks of herself; but she is too precious to me for me to let her run any risks. I will just come in and look at her before I despatch the groom."

He followed Freda into the room. They stood together by the bedside, but no sleeper lay beneath the lace coverlid; those dainty embroidered pillows were pressed by no fair head. Sir John turned impatiently to Miss Armitage.

"They said she was here!"

No answer. What answer could poor Freda give? What was there left for her but silence?

"You don't understand," said the Baroness, angrily; "I want my wife. The servants say she is lying down; that she has been too ill to appear at lunch."

"I know. She is not here."

"I see that, Freda," changing his voice, "what tells you? Can't you speak out and relieve my suspense? Tell me in one word what is the matter with my wife!"

"Nothing, I hope."

"Nothing!" and this time his tone was one of strong indignation. "Nothing! when she is too ill to join her guests! Hyacinth, who seems all notice of trifling ailments; who never takes a moment's thought of her own health! Surely you can understand but little of my wife if you think she could keep her own room for nothing!"

"I did not mean that."

"What then?"

There was nothing for it but the truth. Freda strove to make it as natural and unpremeditated as she could, but she was painfully conscious how strange her story must ring in Sir John's ear.

"You remember you entrusted Lady Hyacinth's letters to me. One of them told her of a friend's dangerous illness, and as you were absent and could not want her society your wife decided to go to London."

Sir John stared.

"What for?"

"To see them—the friend who was ill?"

"But she was ill herself. I tell you the servants believe her in bed."

"I know."

"I hate mysteries," declared the Baroness. "If my wife has gone to London, why is it given out she is confined to her room?"

"I don't know," said Freda, helplessly. "I only understood Lady Hyacinth she did not wish her sudden journey to excite remark perhaps, and a bright idea seized her. She has some poor relations whose circumstances she would not like criticised among her servants."

"She has not a relation in England."

"She will be home soon. I know she intended to be here before seven."

"Precisely," said the Baroness, bitterly. "I was expected at seven. I see it all, Miss Armitage. My wife would have regained her room ere I reached the house. I should have heard the story of her illness. This expedition would have been kept secret even from me."

It was so exactly what had been Hyacinth's intention that her friend was powerless to contradict him.

"What does it mean?" went on Sir John, angrily. "I never refused to take her to Reading. She might have gone in her own carriage to the station. I may have faults, but I am not so craven as to judge people by their fortunes. If my wife had wished to visit the most poverty-stricken family in England and call them her friends, provided their characters were spotless, she should have had her way."

"I cannot tell you," breathed Freda. "I only know that she had the letter, and the

moment she had read it, without an instant's delay, she exclaimed she must go to London."

"Was she unhappy?"

Freda hesitated.

"Answer me!"

"Well, then, I think she was. Her eyes seemed full of some great dumb pain, John," the old name slipping out in her distress. "The moment she told her scheme to me I disapproved of it, and yet I was forced to yield because of that terrible, yearning pain stamped upon her brow."

Sir John walked up and down the room two or three times before he trusted himself to speak. At last he stopped just in front of Freda, and the awful doubt at his heart forced words.

"Can she have been deceiving me all along—lying here at my side—part of myself, the dearest thing on earth to me! Has she had a secret from me, her husband?"

Freda felt certain that she had. Lady Hyacinth's absent manner, her half-confidences, had taught her even before to-day that some concealment pressed heavily on the fair girl-wife.

"Even so," she said, very slowly, "you would not condemn her unheard. She may have a secret, and yet not have wronged you in thought or deed."

Sir John shook his head.

"I trusted her as my own life," he answered, sadly. "I knew, Heaven help me, she did not love me, but I believed her true and innocent. She told me I had no rival, and I believed it. I thought, poor fool, that these months of wedded life—the touch of her child's baby fingers—had drawn us nearer to each other, and now she has been deceiving me all along!"

"Hush!" breathed Freda, "do not speak so angrily. Even if you doubt her you would not let others share your doubts! Everyone in this house believes Lady Hyacinth here in bed. Let them still believe it, for her sake."

"For her sake!" muttered the strong man, as he wiped the damp sweat from his forehead. "For her sake what would I not do. You are right, Freda. No one but us two must guess the truth."

She tried to cheer him. True woman that she was she strove to soothe the agony raging at his heart.

"You know you may be troubling uselessly. You know there may be a very simple explanation of Lady Hyacinth's absence."

"But not of her deceit."

Poor Freda hung her head.

"Besides," went on Sir John, you say yourself there was agitation in her voice, a strange pain shining in her eyes. Hyacinth is not easily excited. I have rarely seen her moved to either joy or sorrow. Depend upon it no light cause could affect her as you describe."

He sat down. Hardly knowing what she did Freda took a seat opposite him and felt in her pocket for the time-table to see how soon she might expect Hyacinth's return. She was so absorbed in studying the time of the trains she never noticed a slip of paper falling to the ground.

Sir John, with mechanical politeness, stooped to raise it. Then some uncontrollable impulse made him read it. Looking up from the time-table Freda saw a new expression on his face.

He handed her the paper.

"Answer me truly. Is not this a portion of the letter which lured my wife from her home?"

Freda bowed her head.

"You have read it?"

"Yes."

"And you can still defend her?"

"I can still trust her," was the calm, resolute reply, which almost staggered Sir John's doubts.

"Your faith has something romantic in its extent," said Sir John, scornfully. "Don't you know that my wife has no mother—that her father is abroad? Who, then, is this mysterious 'he' to seek for whom she has left my house?"

Deep silence. Freda's tears were falling thick and fast. She felt possessed by a great dread. She had no words to answer Sir John.

"You would hardly agree," he went on, still in that cold sarcastic tone, "that a mere friend would have a right to summon my wife to his sick bed, but even this would not avail your cause. Lady Hyacinth lived in the most absolute seclusion before her marriage. For the sake of her health we have lived a very quiet life since. As a matter of fact there is no man in England, to my knowledge, who is intimate with her more than a passing acquaintance."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you infer by your words?"

"I mean that no friend summoned Lady Hyacinth to London. She has gone there at the instigation of a lover."

Quick as thought came back the indignant answer,—

"How dare you!"

He looked bewildered.

"Can't you see it! The facts are plain enough."

"How dare you!" repeated Freda. "You who swore to love and cherish her while life lasted! How can you snail her fair name by such a doubt?"

He sighed. The passionate anger died out of his face. He spoke slowly, calmly, but despairingly, as one whose very heart is broken.

"It is so plain. I loved her at first sight, madly, passionately. I swore that she should be my wife. I knew she did not love me, but I never guessed she had a lover."

"I am certain she had not!"

He shook his head.

"I am not a suspicious man. I have trusted her through all our married life, but, looking back, I can see I have never had her confidence. The last year of her girlhood is a sealed book to me. I know no more of it than a stranger."

They were interrupted. The door of Hyacinth's dressing-room, which led to a private staircase, was abruptly opened. Another moment and the wife whom Sir John worshipped and yet doubted stood before him. One look at his face and the colour faded in her own. Before he could utter a syllable of reproach, before Freda could put a question, our heroine had sunk fainting at her husband's feet. White and still they raised her and laid her on the bed. Then Freda turned to Sir John,—

"You had better leave us; I will take every care of her, and the sight of you might be injurious to her when she recovers."

He obeyed at once.

"I shall send for the doctor."

"Surely that is not necessary!"

"I prefer it." He broke off hastily; then, stooping, he pressed his lips once passionately to the fair, still face, and left the room.

Scarcely knowing what she did, Freda hung over her friend, and called on her by every tender name; she administered restoratives, chafed the ice-cold hands, and used every effort to restore the spirit to its precious home. At last she succeeded—the beautiful eyes slowly opened.

But, oh, the anguish at Freda's heart as she listened to the words which came from Hyacinth's lips!

"He will die, and I shall have killed him. How am I to live without him, my own, my darling! Oh, Heaven! My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Very gently Freda called on her by name.

"You must be calmer, dear, you must not talk so; see, you are at home in your own room."

Hyacinth shuddered.

"Home! Home! And he is an exile from it. Can anyone make me happy without him? What is the use of wealth and money when my heart is plucking for my darling?"

Poor Freda, this was more than she could bear.

"Think of your husband," she urged, "and your little girl; remember, dear, you are Nan's mother."

But this appeal, instead of calming Hyacinth, seemed to make her more excited.

"Nan will die, too," she said wildly. "Do you think she will be spared. From her birth I have known it; it has been on me like a solemn fate that she would die."

"Surely not; she is her father's darling, and

you love her dearly. Why should she not stay with you?"

"I love her dearly," repeated Hyacinth, "but not like him. He was my heart's delight; it is the losing him that is killing me."

"You have been to see him?"—thinking it best to encourage confidence before reason and reserve closed their expression.

"Yes; he knew me, I am sure of it. He smiled at me with his clear eyes, and spoke my name—and then I had to go. The doctor said he could not live through the night, but I dared not stay. I could not risk my husband's finding me absent, and so I left another to close my darling's eyes. I might not even stay to see him draw his last breath."

She was crying so bitterly that Freda's heart ached in sympathy. She might have erred, she might deserve blame; but yet, surely, she was to be pitied—so young, and with such an awful secret.

Her passionate grief had spent itself; she was lying white and still when the doctor came in. He looked at her very gravely, asked several questions of Miss Armitage, and then motioned her to follow him from the sick room.

"This is terribly sudden," he said, gravely; "brain fever is coming rapidly on. Lady Hyacinth must have had some terrible shock."

Freda bowed, she did not feel herself called upon to say how terrible.

"The illness may last for weeks; I will send for a professional nurse. The house should be cleared of visitors; all depends upon my patient being kept as quiet as possible."

But Freda's resolve was taken—no stranger should listen to Hyacinth's delirium, no hired nurse hear the secret of that house.

"I have studied nursing in a hospital," she said, quietly, "and I love Lady Hyacinth dearly; I think you may trust her to my care."

"You don't know what you're undertaking."

"Try me."

"And, besides, I warn you, it will be a long, tedious illness; you'd be worn out."

"I am very strong; besides, I am her friend; I couldn't bear to trust her to strangers. Oh, Dr. Forbes, do let me have my way!"

He yielded; perhaps he had only resisted for her own sake. In an incredibly short time, as it seemed to Freda, the shadow of illness settled on The Elms. Alice and her mother returned to London, escorted by Sir John, and Miss Armitage took up her station in the sick room, with Hyacinth's own maid established in the next apartment, to do all the mechanical part of nursing—she fetching and carrying, the innumerable little errands which demand no skill, and yet are so necessary and fatiguing. It was quite late at night when Sir John came to the door and requested to see Miss Armitage. He looked pale and haggard; he seemed to have grown years older since the morning.

"How is she now?"

"Unconscious."

He hesitated.

"I shall not come here often; it would only be agony to myself and hurtful to her. Freda, I know that I can trust you; if the worst happens you will send for me. Cruelly as she has wronged me I couldn't let her leave me for ever without a last farewell."

Freda bowed her head.

"I am surprised," she said, frankly, "I fancied you would never have left her day or night; that you would have nursed her yourself, and fought doggedly with death, struggling inch by inch to save her from his clutches—and you can go away—can leave her to the care of a comparative stranger."

"You don't understand," returned Sir John; "I am beside myself with jealousy. Life would be worthless to me without Hyacinth, and yet I believe I would rather see her die than know that she would live on, my wife in name, her heart and love another's."

So the days passed on. Far and wide spread the news that the fair young chataigne of The Elms was dying; far and wide people pined her husband, remarking he would never hold up his head after her loss; but the fashionable newspapers, which contained such and reports of her

illness, did not travel to Acacia Cottage. The Grants never heard of Hyacinth's danger, and the old maid who lived next door to them, had closed her house and taken her baby-charge to the seaside to recover from an illness which had nearly cost his life; so these never heard of the blow that had come to Sir John's happiness.

Freda nursed the invalid faithfully; for days and weeks she seemed to live only to tend her. A full account of Hyacinth's illness had been sent by his betrothed to Henry Yorke, and just a murmured confidence that there seemed trouble in store for the Carlyles, and she could not leave Hyacinth to a stranger.

Mr. Yorke's reply was very prompt,—

"Do as your own heart dictates, darling."

But he never mentioned the invalid in his letter; that same unaccountable aversion he had had to talking to his hostess during his visit to The Elms seemed to prevent his writing of her frankly.

So the days went on, and at last the crisis came. Bending over the sick bed Freda hardly knew what she wished or feared; something told her things would never be with Hyacinth as before. Would it not be more merciful to the poor girl to die, then, before she ever felt the pain of her husband's doubts? Would she not be happier in that great silent land, where her ravings seemed to say one dearer than life had already gone, than to dwell on at The Elms a mistrusted, doubted wife?

Sir John had kept his word. Since that hurried interview the night his wife's illness began he had never once been to her room. He saw the doctors after each of their visits. Freda sent him a bulletin night and morning, but he never asked to see her; he never craved admission to the room where Hyacinth lay hovering between life and death.

"It is strange," remarked Dr. Forbes, with the freedom of his profession, one night to Freda in the sick room; "people always told me Sir John was a devoted husband; he takes his wife's illness very calmly."

"He never shows what he feels."

"But not to come near her!"

"He fears to injure her; he made me promise to send for him when"—her voice broke—"when there was no hope."

But she had no occasion to send. At midnight the crisis came. There was a strange hush of expectancy upon the doctor and Freda. They both knew the next hour must decide everything.

Freda sat in a low chair near the bed; Dr. Forbes stood at the foot, his eyes fixed upon Hyacinth's face.

Suddenly she stirred. Quick as thought he was at her side with something in a tumbler. She swallowed it; then she slowly raised her head and opened her eyes.

They looked too large and bright for her thin, pinched face, but the former glittering brilliancy had died out, and the light of reason shone in them now. The voice was quiet and calm, though very weak and faint as she asked, feebly,—

"Have I been very ill?"

"Yes," said Dr. Forbes, pleasantly. "You have given this young lady and me no end of trouble; but you are better now, and we don't mean you to slip through our fingers this time."

"I don't think I want to get better."

Freda understood the reason. The doctor put it down to the despondency of weakness.

"That's because you feel so faint and tired. You'll change your mind in a day or two. What would Sir John say to hear such things?"

A faint flush dyed her cheek.

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"My husband."

"Here, of course." Then, with a pardonable untruth: "I've shut him out of this room for fear he should excite you. Did you want to see him?"

She shook her head.

"I am so tired."

"Yes; sleep's what you want. In another week or two you'll be as lively as a cricket."

She sighed.

"And you think I shall get better?"

"I feel sure of it, humanly speaking; but you mustn't talk, my dear young lady."

She closed her eyes—another moment and she was asleep.

Dr. Forbes slipped away to find Sir John.

"You may take heart now; the worst is past. In a few weeks Lady Hyacinth will be herself again."

But Sir John did not look in the least like taking heart.

"Are you sure there is no fear of a relapse?"

"None whatever, with ordinary care."

"And you think there is no danger?"

Dr. Forbes felt puzzled.

"I think, humanly speaking, there is no doubt that Lady Hyacinth will have a swift and perfect recovery."

"Ah!"

And the next thing Dr. Forbes heard was that Sir John had left The Elms.

"I call it brutal."

That was how the kind old man expressed himself to Freda on hearing the news.

"Why?"

"To desert his wife when she has been through such peril."

"Sir John may have his own reasons."

"And you defend him?"

"No; I only feel sorry."

"You think there is something wrong?"

"I fear there is a misunderstanding between them," she said, reluctantly.

"A pretty bad one if he can't forgive her when she has nearly lost her life."

They kept the news of her husband's absence from Hyacinth. She never asked for him; only as she grew stronger, and was able to be moved from her bed to a sofa, they noticed that her eyes never left the door. They used to fix themselves on it with a strange, and persistency. She seemed always waiting, always watching; and the air of disappointment which settled on her features went to Freda's very heart.

"What is it, dear?"

The time had passed on now. The bright, glad Christmastide was over, and the new year a few days old. Before very long would come Freda's own wedding. Oh, how she yearned to know that all was well with Hyacinth and her husband before she left them!

"Where is John?"

Rarely, very rarely, did she use the name without any prefix. Her eyes were fixed upon Freda as though she would read her very soul.

Miss Armitage hesitated.

"He is not here, Hyacinth."

"Is he well?"

"I think so."

"And he is away. He left me when they thought I was dying."

"He went away the day you were pronounced out of danger."

"Ah, Freda! my brain seems in a whirl; help me to remember. What happened just before I was taken ill? I seem to see John's face looking at me full of cruel reproach; and yet it must be all idle fancy. He never spoke an unkind word to me in his life."

The moment for explanation had come. Freda knew it could not have been delayed much longer.

"Sir John thinks you have wronged him, Hyacinth," she said, slowly. "He has gone away angry and disappointed; and yet I think his anger springs solely from his love of you."

Lady Hyacinth Carlyle looked her thin hands nervously together. The wedding-ring hung—ah! so loosely—upon her taper finger. She was striking it half carelessly as she answered,—

"I meant it for the best; indeed I did."

"You meant what, dear?"

"Keeping my secret. Oh, Freda! it has lain heavy on my heart. It has been like a canker eating away at the happiness of my life. I married Sir John without loving him, but he won my heart in spite of myself. He made me love him better than the whole world; and then it became day by day more impossible to tell him how I had wronged him. Oh, Freda! a dozen times the confusion trembled on my lips, and I

could not make it. I dared not risk losing his love."

"You cannot do that," returned Freda. "I don't think anything in the world would make Sir John cease to love you if he knew his love was returned."

"He does not know it. You say he thinks I have wronged him; and so I have."

"But," cried the bewildered listener, "you speak as if you loved Sir John, and—"

"I love my husband as my own soul, but I have a secret I have kept from him, and if he discovers it he will hate me."

"I don't understand," said Freda, simply. "How could Sir John hate you—his wife, the mother of his little child?"

Hyacinth sighed. "He would despise me; and I—I think his scorn would kill me."

"Do you remember the day you were taken ill?" asked Freda. "You had been to London unknown to anyone but me. You returned to find Sir John here, wondering at your absence. The sad, reproachful look you saw on his face must have been then. I know that he was terribly upset."

"And did he guess—does he suspect?"

"I fear he does."

"I must have whispered it in my sleep," mourned poor Hyacinth. "No one who knows the truth would betray me."

"He found a piece of your letter," went on Freda. "He read it, and then, I think, his faith and trust in you were shaken."

She did not repeat the words Sir John had read. Hyacinth imagined her husband had seen a very different portion of the letter. She grew pale as sculptured marble.

"That explains all."

"How?"

"He knows the truth. He will never love me or trust me again. Oh, Freda! why did you let me get better! Life is not worth the living without my husband's love."

There was a long, long silence between the two friends. Freda could think of no comfort for a grief like Hyacinth's; she had made her brain ache with the effort to think of some plan to unite the two troubled hearts. They loved each other—what could then be the nature of the tie which lured Hyacinth to a stranger's death-bed?

She knew that in the earliest days of her convalescence Lady Hyacinth had demanded her letters, and selecting one with the Ventnor postmark had read it eagerly; then a look of intense thankfulness had overspread her beautiful face, and she had murmured, softly: "Thank Heaven!" but this had failed to give her any clue to the mystery of Hyacinth's life.

"He knows all," said the young wife slowly; "that letter has told him. Oh, Freda! I shall never see his face again—never any more!"

She was mistaken. That night a new terror fell on the household: Nan was taken ill—Nan, who was her father's darling, the light of his very eye. Unfit as she was for exertion Lady Hyacinth never left the nursery; she hung over her darling's cradle, hoping against hope her husband might return. Dr. Forbes telegraphed to him at once, saying to Freda, in an undertone, he knew Sir John had returned to England, and was staying at the Langham Hotel.

The night seemed endless to the watchers, but it was over at last, and the first rays of the winter sun found Hyacinth sitting in a low chair with a little still form in her arms—all that remained of Nan. Footsteps sounded; the doctor, who stood there persuading Hyacinth her task was ended, started—he felt sure Sir John had returned; very gravely he drew Freda with him into an adjoining room.

"No one should witness their meeting," he said to her, quietly. "Surely, whatever differences have been between them must be forgotten now in their dead child's presence."

Sir John entered. His wife turned to him with a kind of hoarse sob.

"It is all over—our darling has gone to Paradise. Oh, John, won't you forgive me for her sake?"

John Carlyle took the little white form in his

arms and laid it down reverently—fondly; but he never seemed to heed his wife's appeal.

"John," she repeated, passionately; "speak to me. Tell me, at least, why you are so cruel!"

"Cruel!" he repeated, bitterly. "Is it for you to use such a word! You who have been false to a poet's fancy—more heartless than a dream. You to talk of cruelty!"

"Spare me," she murmured. "Oh, spare me—have pity, John!"

"Pity! What pity did you show to me! I loved you madly—passionately, and you promised to be mine. You swore to me no love for another filled your heart, and you came to me with that lie upon your lips."

"I thought you would be angry," she said, wistfully. "You had told me you were of a jealous nature, and—"

"And so you deceived me and went to see your idol in secret. You thought you might keep me in ignorance of your treachery."

"It was not treachery," said Hyacinth, fiercely. "He had the first right to me; I forsake him to be your wife. What harm was there in my seeing him from time to time, just to still the awful yearning pain ever raging at my heart?"

Sir John looked at her with a passionate anger in his eyes.

"And you dare to say that to me in the presence of our dead child—you dare to say it!"

"Yes. I wronged you bitterly in marrying you, but that was my sole offence."

"Your notions of right and wrong are strangely perverted." His eyes wandered to the baby face. "You know I loved her well—that Nan was my heart's delight. Well, I stand here, Hyacinth, and tell you I would rather see her lying stiff and cold than that she should have grown up like you. For all time my home will be desolate; and yet I thank Heaven, upon my bended knees, I have no other children to call you mother."

His wife flung herself on her knees at his feet. Every trace of hardness and pride had gone out of her face—she just knelt there a tender, supplicating woman.

"For her sake," she pleaded, "for Baby Nan's sake, who loved us both, unsway those dreadful words. Oh, John! I may have erred long ago, but I was so young, and I had no mother to help me. Oh, John! I never wronged you in thought or word since I became your wife! Oh, surely you will forgive the past and take me to your heart again!"

"Never!"

"I am so young," she pleaded. "Think, I may have to drag out fifty weary years before my life is ended. Oh, John! will you make me spend them all a weary exile from your love?"

"You never cared for my love—you married me for money. Deny it if you can."

"I married you because I was desolate and in sorrow," she repeated, slowly. "I know I came to you without love, but the love has come now warm and constant—strong enough to withstand even such cruelty as yours."

She had come close beside him now, and timidly she put one lily-white hand upon his arm, and looked up into his face.

"Forgive me, John," she moaned.

But he shook her off impatiently.

"You don't know what you ask. I have loved you as few men love. I gave you a boundless trust—a deep, intense affection. I believed you the purest, truest of women. My idol is shattered, and is crumbled to the ground. Do you think I can forget the agony you have made me suffer! Do you think I could bear the torture of living at your side and doubting every word, every look, every action of your life!"

"You might have mercy."

"Had I loved you less it would have been easier to forgive. As it is, you have destroyed every hope, every aspiration, of my life."

She was crying to herself. He went on coldly,—

"You may spare those tears; you will lose

nothing of the good things for which you married me. The onus of our estrangement shall rest with me. Every respect and consideration due to the Lady Hyacinth Carlyle shall be paid you; you shall have ample money to gratify any caprice. I make no restriction, no condition, save that you refrain from disgracing the name I gave you fifteen months ago."

And then, erect and proud, his handsome face unmoved—only the thick blue lines on his forehead telling of the storm raging at his heart—he stood there, without one look of pity or compassion for the miserable girl who knelt at his feet, whom yet (strange inconsistency of his nature) he loved better than name, houses, or lands—nay, better than life itself.

(To be continued.)

THE PRIDE OF THE CHEVENIXES.

—20—

(Continued from page 158.)

"She did not take much trouble to find him!" Mrs. Chevenix said, with a touch of bitterness in her voice.

"She did all she could," was the reply. "She was nearly killed before she met her aunt, and lay at the threshold of the other world for a long time. She has been a helpless invalid most of the time since that fatal day when she visited you; and—"

"Ah! don't say anything about that," Gertrude said, hastily. "I never think of it without feeling thoroughly ashamed of it all! It was so pitiful, so mean of us all!"

"It was," Mrs. Chevenix said. "I can see that now. It was such a shock—her extraordinary appearance and her manner; but we knew nothing of what they had gone through till it was too late to mend what we had done. But did you say that the dress was for her—that rough, uncultivated girl?"

"You saw her; but she did not recognise you."

"The girl who chose the colours and the pattern; a girl with lovely hair and a perfect complexion. Is that Herbert's wife?"

"Yes; Miss Vere Schwerf."

"But she looked a lady, and spoke like an educated person!"

"All that has come of her illness and her association with my dear old nurse, who is a lady, every inch of her!" the Duke said. "How far the education has gone, I do not know; but she has profited by her enforced leisure to read and observe. You will find her well-informed and quick of perception, and a lovable new daughter if you elect to receive her!"

"If!" Mrs. Chevenix said. "There will be no 'if' now; my poor boy has suffered enough."

The words were hardly spoken before Herbert came back, too much agitated at first to notice that there was anyone there, or to tell what had befallen him. When it was told, and they had sat till late into the night talking over it, he began to realize what the Duke's presence in his mother's house meant.

"Yes, I have come for an answer to the question I put to her when your father died," his Grace said, "and I am not going to take any answer but yes this time! What is the shortest space of time in which you can dispose of your business, Madame Hoyle Smith?" he asked, with a little laugh.

"I can get out of it at any time," Mrs. Chevenix replied. "I have a young lady-assistant, who has bemoaned all the time she has been with me that her friends did not seize the opportunity, and put her in it when I bought it. It has improved since then, and she would take it if easy terms were allowed her."

"Install her to-morrow morning. Make her a present of it!" said the Duke, impetuously. "I want Gertrude, and you to take care of her. I can't come to a dressmaker's show-room; and I warn you I shall haunt the place she is in,

wherever that may be! If she stays here I shall live on these stairs, and there might be scandal."

"I think there would," Mrs. Chevenix said; and then she told him he must go away, and come and talk matters over seriously in broad daylight. She had not given her consent to her daughter being carried off in that fashion.

They had almost to put him out, and the demure little servant was much scandalized by the proceeding. The household had hitherto been so very early in their habits—they were all too tired to sit up late—and the clock at the Assembly Hall had chapped two," she told her mother in recounting the events of the evening before "the strange mon gead awa'!"

Matters were not arranged with quite so much celerity, but less than a week elapsed before Miss Mackenzie announced to her friends and the public that she had purchased the business of Madame Hoyle Smith, and trusted by strict attention, &c. People wondered, but no one knew exactly the reason of the change. There was no one to tell just what had happened, for Mrs. Golding and her household migrated southward at the same time as the Chevenix family, and only her confidential servant, who went with her, knew what had happened.

Mr. Chevenix, out in Italy, read presently of the arrival in Rome of the Duke and Duchess of Melton and party, and went over—the gentleman to renew his acquaintance with the Duke, the lady to introduce herself to him, and become, if possible, the friend of the Duchess.

It was an event to be remembered when, at the house of one of the first people in Rome, they heard announced, first the Duke and Duchess of Melton, then Mrs. Chevenix, then Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Chevenix. Herbert and the Duke always go into fits of laughter when they recall Algernon's face of bewilderment and horror on that night, and his wife's undeluged fright. The elder branch of the Chevenix family fled in dismay. Algernon was too great a coward to risk a meeting with his brother after the way in which he had treated his mother and sister.

Gortruide sought him out and made peace, as far as her mother and herself were concerned; but it was some time before Herbert could bring himself to speak to his brother. A sort of peace was patched up between them after awhile, and they met occasionally; but Mrs. Algernon Chevenix can never forgive her sister-in-law her bonny boy, in whom some day the old glories of the house will be revived, for the despised Australian wife is an heiress, and her fortune will buy back the property in good time.

The Duke is too happy, he declares, to be at enmity with any one, so he holds out the right hand of fellowship to Algernon, whom he secretly dislikes, as much as it is possible for an amiable man to dislike anyone. He declares that he is the happiest man in the three kingdoms; that he has the best wife, the prettiest boy, and the best mother-in-law of any man alive.

[THE END.]

HOSPITAL nurses, despite the hardness of their lot, are believed to retain their youthful looks much longer than most girls; and the hard-worked ladies on the stage are likewise noted for their extreme juvenility. English girls, as a rule, retain their youthful looks much longer than their Scottish and Irish sisters, while French ladies are especially young-looking. Italian and Spanish women mature early, and fade as suddenly. The latter are usually beautiful while in their teens, but assume a coarseness at a very early age. Turkish beauties keep their good looks and youthful appearance until well beyond middle life, and the same has been said of Grecian ladies. But in very few countries do women retain a juvenility which enables them to appear youthful when old enough to be called "grandmammas;" yet this may be said of Englishwomen and their sisters of France.

SWEETHEART AND TRUE.

—10:—

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

"PERHAPS your dog is truer, more faithful a friend than human ones might be," he answered a little gravely, for it suddenly dawned upon his comprehension that this girl might have a history. That she was out of her element here he plainly saw, and the fact of her being an English girl seemingly planted in this country of Brittany added to this freshly-concoiled idea. "Even one's best friends are not always to be relied on with perfect faith, but a dog never deceives one—he cannot fawn unless he really likes."

"No, you are right in that. No friend could be truer, or perhaps so true as my dog Zouave, and I know that I could not love any human friend better than I do him," she ended with some force.

"He is a most fortunate dog," he asserted quite quietly in answer, as if only uttering a mere truism. "Will you pardon me if I ask you what I trust you will not consider an impertinent question?" he asked, after a small pause.

"Certainly, what is it?"

"Do you live here? I mean in Pont l'Abbaye?" he amended.

"Yes!" she answered, at once. "I live at the water-mill called 'Moulinot.' I believe Joane's guide to Brittany gives it a place as being a picturesque feature of Pont l'Abbaye."

"Yes! it does, now you mention it. I intended to find the water-mill out before I left, thinking it might perhaps look well in a sketch. I am only a tourist artist, you know, wandering over Brittany in search of subjects for my brush," he added, in explanation. I find Pont l'Abbaye full of interest and beautiful scenery, though as yet I have seen but very little of it. I only arrived yesterday morning."

"That is why I have not seen him about before," thought Olive, as she heard him.

"Pont l'Abbaye is considered one of the prettiest places in this part of Brittany," she said, aloud. "It is not greatly visited, to be sure, for it is rather out of the way of the ordinary tourist."

"Yes! I can quite understand that being the case. It is off the high road from town to large town, which is the reason for its being not much frequented as you say; but it is really a little gem of a spot, especially to an artist, and will keep my brushes on the go for some time, I am sure," he ended, with an air of appreciation.

"So he is not going away just yet," again thought Olive, and the idea somehow seemed rather a satisfactory one.

It is not agreeable to lose a possible friend as soon as one happens to fall in with one; which may have accounted for the girl's secret satisfaction at his merely casual announcement of an intention to remain in the neighbourhood for a short time at least.

"Yes!" she responded, a little slowly; "there are plenty of lovely sketches to be made hereabouts."

"And you say Moulinot is one of them, do you not?" he argued, with a pleasant smile.

"Most certainly I do. I think it the dearest old place myself, just like a picture."

"And I have your permission to come and take it whenever I like?" he asked again, evidently determined that on his side at least there should be no misunderstanding on the matter of his coming or not.

"Decidedly you have, if you wish it," returned Olive, frankly; "but I confess to you that there is really no necessity for your permission at all. You can come whether you have it or not; any artist can sketch it if he chooses without a formal with your leave, or by your leave."

"But I should not care to intrude upon your premises, or do anything that might be disagreeable either to you or—your people," he ended up, quickly.

Olive gave vent to a little soft laugh, which was a peculiarity of hers, a soft sound belong-

ing to her alone, full of harmony and sweetness.

"My people!" she repeated, wrinkling up her pretty brows in tiny furrows. "Oa, you need not be at all afraid of 'my people,' as you phrase it, for I do not possess any."

He looked at her in evident astonishment, not quite certain in his own mind whether she was in earnest, or merely joking for the moment.

"Do not look so amazed," she said, laughing once more. "It is quite true what I am saying; I do not possess any people—not at Pont l'Abbaye, at any rate."

"Do you live at Moulinot alone then?" he queried the next moment, still with the same perplexed look on his face, for he could not understand the situation at all.

"Well, no, not exactly alone," she rejoined, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, which he thought infinitely charming. "I am not perfectly alone at the water-mill. There is André the gardener, for instance, and Nanette his wife."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as she paused for a second, as if waiting for some comment from him, and he really could not on the spur of the moment find anything else to say.

"And then there is Miss Daunt," Olive went on, with an air of imparting some interesting information.

"Miss Daunt!" he echoed politely, wondering who in the universe was Miss Daunt, and what she had to do with the girl before him. He would like to have added, and who is she? But he thought he would wait and see if he was to be enlightened further on the question. As it so happened he was to glean further information, for Olive went on to remark as an afterthought,—

"Yes, Miss Rebecca Daunt, my guardian. So you see with André Nanette, and Miss Daunt, I do not exactly live at Moulinot alone," and she lifted her two laughing eyes to his.

"No, I quite agree to that," he answered, returning the gaze and smile. "I stand corrected."

"And you can now understand, too, that you need not be at all afraid of offending my people. And as for myself, I shall be very glad if you do come and sketch the old water-mill," she ended, most candidly.

For she would like to see those deep grey eyes again, she acknowledged to herself, with a vague feeling of pleasure at the idea.

As for this stranger, or "A. C.," or grey eyes—for he answered to all these christenings in Olive's mind—he liked her thoroughly unstudied genuineness of speech and manner.

It both amused, pleased, and interested him all at the same time. He found it so different to the usual studied expression and artifice of voice and manner affected by the society belles with whom he had been brought into contact.

She seemed a nice, friendly, and certainly a pretty little thing, he inwardly determined.

"Do you know that you are very unconventional!" he asked, after a short silence, and gazing with meditative eyes at her, as she sat under the thick-leaved alders, with Zouave by her side.

"Am I?" she rejoined, with a tiny shrug of her shoulders, French fashion. "How do you mean, unconventional? It's a word I don't quite know the meaning of! Do you mean by it that I have said or done something wrong, something out of the common, and against etiquette and good breeding?" she added, earnestly.

"No, no, not at all!" he returned, quickly; "pray do not for one moment imagine I meant such a thing, or even thought it! You have not said or done the faintest thing contrary to good form that I can see. You mistake me quite; I had no such meaning, I do assure you!"

"But you must have meant something when you called me unconventional!" she argued, not without some small spirit. "You think, perhaps, that I"—she hesitated a second—"that I ought not to be talking here now to you like this!" and she lifted two limpid eyes deprecatingly to him. "Is that unconventional?"

"Well, yes! Since you ask me the question

in such an honest manner I will answer you as honestly," he said, heartily. "The world and society might call it unconventional, without a doubt. I do not know if it would also condemn it; I know that I do not condemn it," he asserted, emphatically; "far from condemning, I find it, if you will pardon my saying so, very delightful. When I said just now that you were unconventional, I meant it more as a compliment than anything else, most certainly not as a reproach."

"But would society think it wrong of me, then, to talk to you as I have done?" she asked, almost reproachfully, the next moment.

"What does it matter whether society would or not?" he answered, diplomatically. "I detest Mrs. Grundy myself, to tell you the honest truth. She is a dreadful old bore, I think. I have never bowed to her whim and fancies on etiquette yet, and I never mean to, that is more. I almost wish I had kept my unlucky speech about your being unconventional to myself, since it seems to alarm you so!" he ended, seating himself on the wooden bench beside her.

"I am not alarmed!" she said, very quietly. "It is not that, only I do not want to be bad style. I know so little of English social life and forms; nothing whatever, in fact. Here in Pont l'Abbaye there is no social code; one does as one likes, I think, and only please ourselves."

"Surely the very best plan too," he rejoined, lightly. "After all, why should not one please oneself? I know it's a very arduous task pleasing other people, or trying to, for one generally succeeds in pleasing nobody in the end. I am afraid I always think first of pleasing myself, which, I own, is but a selfish proceeding at best, but a more satisfactory one than the other. Besides," he goes on more gravely, "it is really my fault that you are here at all. Did I not ask you to come and look at my sketch?"

"Yes, you certainly did ask me!" returned Olive, the dimples once more appearing in her cheeks.

"And I am sure you would never have dreamt of coming by your own accord, would you?" he inquired, with just a tinge of eager questioning in his tone, as if he would not be averse to hearing her say that she would have come to the water's edge without that asking.

"I am not so very certain that I should not!" said Olive, with a tiny shrug of her shoulders, after a pause, while he waited for an answer. "I dream of a good many things in the course of a day here. One has so much time on hand, and any excitement or change, however small, is a relief. I may have thoughts of coming; I am not at all certain that I should not," she added, slowly.

The grey eyes visibly brighten, and he laughs a good, honest, sounding laugh.

"There, now, you grumble at my calling you unconventional, and you show it in almost every word you say! If you had really been conventional you would never have avowed even the very faintest intention of coming. So you see I am right about it."

"Well, perhaps you are," she agreed at length. "I don't know whether it matters much whether I am or not."

"Of course it does not. Surely in a little Breton village like this Pont l'Abbaye, one can afford to be regardless of society formalities. It is true," he goes on rather rapidly, "that we have not been what etiquette calls introduced to one another by some third person, which is the usual heralding of an acquaintanceship. But I, for one, cannot see that because we have neither been named to each other, we should on that account be denied an afternoon's pleasant chat together, do you?"

"No," rejoined Olive, but she murmured it rather dubiously; for she knew very well what Miss Daunt would have to say on the subject were she asked such a question.

"That was a very doubting no," he put in the next minute, "the sort of no that sometimes means yes. I am afraid," he added with conviction, "that you think me secretly a very impatient fellow."

"Oh, no, indeed," said the girl, very quickly,

and this time there could be no mistaking that her negation meant no in earnest.

"I am glad of that, for I do not mean to be, and I should be very sorry if I thought you did. It is a pity no available third person was handy to turn mediator, and, socially, according to good form, introduce us to each other, since you evidently lean to that side of the argument—"

"But I do not," murmured Olive, interrupting him.

"For I think we might have become quite good friends," he went on, finishing his interrupted sentence leisurely.

The colour flushed into Olive's soft, creamy cheeks.

"Perhaps we might," she assented, in a low voice. Inwardly she thought how delightful it would be to have grey eyes for a real friend. One to talk to, walk about with and listen to. Yes, such a friend as that would, indeed, be most charming. If it only could have been like that, as he said!

"For my part, I see no earthly reason why such a consummation should not happen," he said, quietly, in return. "I shall be in and about Pont l'Abbaye sketching for the next two or three weeks, and I hope we may meet again many times during those few weeks. I have no one with me, to vouch for my personal status and respectability to you," with a smile in his grey eyes. "In this case I can only be my own trumpeter—a thankless occupation, I sadly fear. However, for want of a better, I must fall back upon my unworthy self."

As he was speaking he had been feeling in his breast-pocket, and now brought out a little plain, dark russet-leather case, whereon Olive saw two silver initials, A. C.

He opened it, and took out a card.

"Here is my voucher, something at least which will speak for me," he went on, laughingly, laying the little card on the bench where they were resting.

Olive could not see what was written on it; to her it looked from that distance like hieroglyphics. She let it lay where it was, uncertain for the moment whether to take it or not.

Then he closed the russet-leather case in his hand, put it back in his pocket, and rose to his feet, standing in front of her.

"I think I must say good afternoon now," he began, putting the strap over his sketch-book. "I have some letters to write before the 'diligence' leaves the hotel with the day's post. You—you will, I am sure, give me the pleasure of hearing your name before I go," he added, politely, gazing down at her.

"Oh, yes, certainly I will," answered the girl, at once, without a moment's hesitation of voice or manner; "my name is Olive!"

"Olive!" he echoed, slowly after her; "but I cannot exactly call you Olive," with a comical glance from his grey eyes; and at that moment he was not at all sure that he should not like to call this fresh, nice little friendly thing Olive.

The dimples appeared at his speech.

"I really forgot," she said, laughingly. "Everyone calls me Olive, or Mademoiselle Olive, so that I almost forgot that I ought to add a surname. Olive Lyster, then," she added, remembering what Miss Daunt had once said to her when she asked about her name; "but I am nearly always known as Olive only."

"Olive Lyster!" he quietly repeated after her explanation, "it is a pretty name!"

The girl gave her pretty shoulders their tiny shrug once more.

"Do you think so?" she rejoined, indifferently.

"Certainly I do. Don't you?" answering question by question.

"I have really never thought much about it. One gets so used to one's own name that it is difficult to decide whether it is pretty or ugly."

"It is decidedly an uncommon one," he went on again. "Olive, Olive Lyster, and very harmonious too! Each name seems just made for the other. Lyster is a good old English name. I wonder where your people came from—what part of England I mean. Do you know?"

"No," answered the girl, quickly; "no, I do not."

"Well," taking up his paint-box and sketch-book, and holding them both in his left hand, "when do you think it probable we shall meet again?"

The little card still lies on the bench within the girl's reach, but she has not yet made out the seeming hieroglyphics on its white surface.

"I do not know. How can I possibly tell?" she returned, a little confusedly, for the question is a very point-blank one, it must be confessed.

"I hope it will be soon, or I shall have to come and sketch Moulton as a last resource. Good-bye!" and he stretched out his right hand towards her.

Olive looked up at him with a quick glance.

"It is an English custom," he put in, almost apologetically; "only an English usage between acquaintances and friends. We are both English; let us shake hands, and do honour to the good old custom."

There was no gainsaying his argument, given out in such an honest, manly fashion. In her heart Olive could not find even the vestige of an excuse, however feeble it might be, for not complying with his request; and then, too, those deep grey eyes added their entreaty to his expressed wish.

She felt she could not help it, and so she stretched forth her soft, brown hand, tanned by the summer sun, and gave it into his.

"Good-bye," he said again. "I am very pleased to have met you, and we are going to be friends, are we not?" and he held her hand while he asked.

"If you like," she murmured, in response.

"Indeed, I do like. You know what Blair says on friendship, do you not?"

"No. What does he say?" lifting her brown eyes to his face.

"He remarks most aptly: 'Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul. Sweetener of life, solder of society, I owe thee much. Thou hast deserved of me far, far beyond what I can ever pay.' You see how high he prizes friendship, and I think rightly so!"

Then he loosed her hand.

"After all, I shall not say good-bye, only *au revoir*. It is a pleasant expression than the other, to my mind, and much more fitted for the occasion than the other. Good-bye is always an unpleasant word, I think, and we are going to meet again, and soon I trust. So again *au revoir*, Miss Olive Lyster!" and taking off his hat he goes on his way.

Olive looked after him till he was out of sight in the wooded path by the river leading towards Pont l'Abbaye, her hands lying idle in her lap.

The river ran past the landing-stage with a ripple and rush. Zouave lay with his head on his paws in a calm dog sleep, ready to spring up, however, at any sign of his mistress's intention to move from her seat.

The girl's mind was in a perfect whirl of thought and cogitation over a man's grey eyes and pleasant voice.

At last she heaved the faintest of sighs, awoke seemingly from her day-dream, turned her head and looked at the little card lying on the wooden seat beside her.

For a whole minute she gazed at it dreamingly, then she took it up slowly in her hand and looked at it.

In old English capitals was engraved,

"ALAN CHICHESTER!"

CHAPTER VI.

"Oh! you that have the charge of Love! keep him in rocky bondage bound. Loosen not a tie that round him clings; nor ever let him use his wings. For even an hour, a minute's flight!"

It was market-day at Quimpalra.

This quaint old Breton town, nine miles from the little village of Pont l'Abbaye on the Odé, was one of the largest centres for marketing in the whole of that part of Brittany.

It boasted a curious old market-place, filled

with little stalls of marketable produce on one day in each week, when the farmers' wives from all the country round jogged into Quimpaire and exhibited their wares on the little stalls set up for the purpose, chattering one to the other, like a swarm of human magpies, as they undoubtedly were, waking up the slumbrous old town into something akin to liveliness.

Nannette Blaise, of the Pont l'Abbaye water-mill, had a tiny stall among the rest, where she sold butter, eggs, and fruit from the mill-garden, cultivated, watched and nurtured to perfection by André, who also fed the poultry, and fatted them ready for the market.

The old woman always drove herself into Quimpaire every week in a little Breton cart of peculiar structure, but which ran along the hard, white, colling, and often dusty road smoothly enough, despite its somewhat uncouth appearance, and was drawn by an aged mule, christened Bruno, presumably on account of his colour, which was certainly a brown, though of rather a dingy hue.

Bruno was old, no one really quite knew how old. He was a kind of Methuselah in Pont l'Abbaye, and respected accordingly.

Nannette was proud of him, as she sat behind him on market-days with her baskets of produce, while he ambled along most steadily and contentedly to his destination and back again the same day.

Sometimes Olive would go too. It was a small change in the dulness of her life at Pont l'Abbaye; and Miss Daunt, singularly enough, never put her veto on the proceeding, which she might have done in this case without any great exercise of mordant authority.

But Miss Daunt knew Nannette was as steady as old Time, which may possibly have been the reason for this relaxing of her usual stiff rule and regulation.

Indeed, for the past year or more, the girl had been left a great deal to Nannette's care and guidance.

Miss Daunt spent the most of her day at the convent with the nuns, who no doubt imagined they were going to reap a new convert in this visitor to their peaceful cloisters and simple existence.

Thus Olive had more liberty of thought and action than during all her previous life, and she had the greatest affection for Nannette, who, I am bound to say, humoured her in the smallest wish.

This August morning, quite early, long before the sun had made its beams too hot and irksome, and when the dew still lay in great diamond beads on every tree, flower, and pasture land, these two, the young girl and the old woman, had mounted the little oddly-built Breton cart, and Bruno, in his rope harness, had carried them to Quimpaire, with all his usual steadiness of purpose, and also, it must be owned, of pace as well. Bruno could never be accused of fleetness by his worst enemy, which is saying a great deal for him.

Olive was not nearly so full of lively chatter on the road to market as was her general custom, for her thoughts ran so much upon that little white card with the graven name, "Alan Olchhester" thereon, and also of the owner of that same card, which had been presented to her, as a voucher of respectability, only the previous evening, that she really forgot to talk.

"Alan Olchhester!" she murmured inwardly, as they passed fields and hedgerows, cottage and garden, on their way to Quimpaire. "Yes, it was a nice name for a man, and much more satisfactory to know, than to be obliged to think of him as A. C., or even as gray eyes."

So far, however, from being completely satisfied with her knowledge—and, I think she ought to have been only that the human mind is a most wayward obstinate construction, and refuses to be guided in such things—it rather tended to heighten a desire to know more about him than his mere name. Where he lived, what he was, and who were his people, were obvious facts that now seemed to urge themselves upon her notice.

Perhaps time might answer these questions for her; she hoped time would be so kind as to

do so. She was still thinking about him when they reached the Quimpaire market-place, where Bruno stopped without any checking on the part of Nannette, for he knew his way quite as well as she did herself, and the two got out, Olive first, as by right of youth.

Then Nannette arranged her fruit, flowers, eggs, and butter on the little stall with its striped awning overhead, and sat down on the rush-seat ready for the day's sale.

Olive as usual sauntered about through the market, chatting here and there to the different people she knew, and the farmers' wives all had a smile and nod for her. When she was tired of moving, she knew Nannette had another little rush-seat behind the stall where she could sit and rest as long as she chose, but for the present she preferred to wander about the different stalls, and see all that was to be seen in the market-place.

At last, just at the noonday, when the very busiest part of the market was over, she went and sat down under the awning, and Nannette placed a cup of milk before her, with a vine leaf of golden Reine Claude gager, and two superbly ripe, luscious peaches, which she soon set her pretty white teeth into with enjoyment.

As she commenced the second peach she suddenly heard a voice behind her say, quite quietly,—

"A feast for the gods!"

She started, laid down the peach, and turned her head quickly in the direction of that quiet conclusion.

Then a tiny flash came into her face, and a smile to her lips, for there stood the owner of the card, about whom her thoughts had been straying.

He stepped round at once, and doffed his hat to her.

"Good morn!" he said again, putting out his hand with the obvious intention of a reciprocating motion on Olive's part.

She hesitated one second, glanced swiftly at Nannette calmly sitting on her rush-seat close by, knitting a very thick woollen stocking for André's winter wear, and then put forth her small soft hand to be shaken.

Whether Nannette took note of the operation could not be determined, for the old woman never lifted her eyes from her knitting, and seemed perfectly oblivious that any such small ceremony had been enacted between these two; she had never even looked in the newcomer's direction at all.

Olive had her suspicions, however, that Nannette saw very well what had taken place, despite her seeming blindness, and no doubt formed her own conclusions on the matter, for she knew the old dear could see through a brick wall as well, if not better, than most people; and she also knew that Nannette was her friend, not her enemy, and would never carry any tale-prattling to Miss Daunt, no matter how naughty she was. So Olive did not mind at all whether she had noted or not; and surely there was no harm in it, the girl argued, and, perhaps, quite jolly too.

"Do you know I watched you eating that magnificent peach just now, and I candidly confess I was there and then seized with a horrible and overpowering envy!" he goes on comically, when the handshake had come to an end, and the greeting finished.

"Were you?" returns Olive, with a smile, looking up at him, standing there in the sunshine on the rough stones in the old market-place.

"Yes! I own it to my sorrow, for it was a very greedy envy, and nearly mastered me into coming forward before you had finished it, and asking you point-blank for a bite!"

"Why did you not? I am sure you would have been very welcome to one," she rejoins laughing broadly till the dimples came.

"Should I? You are sure of that!" he questions, with some small energy.

"Of course; why should I not be!" she argues, with all simplicity. "Of course you would have had a bite directly—two, or even three bites if you wanted them."

"Are you always so ready to give when you

are asked?" he says, rather pointedly, "or does it only extend to such material things as fruits; because one would like to know how much one might ask for without risking a terrible refusal, not that I think you would prove very hard-hearted in any case," he adds, looking down at the soft face.

"No," she answers, with a little shrug and laugh. "I am not hard-hearted, that I am certain of."

"So am I," he puts in, heartily. "Well, to prove you, give me a bite of that peach you have in your hand. It looks a better one than the other. I long to taste it."

"I think it is sweeter than the other," she agrees, with the faintest of rosy reds coming into her cheeks at his request. "Eat—but I have bitten into this peach. Won't you rather have these Reine Claude plums, they are just as good!" and she offers him the leaf of golden gager.

"No!" he says, decidedly, with a shake of the head, refusing the proffered dainties; I have seen my heart on tasting that peach. The Reine Claude plums may be very good; indeed, I do not doubt it, but that peach is better still. That peach or nothing!" he ends, airily.

"Very well," she returns, holding it out to him; "here it is. You shall have the peach, and I'll eat the poor, despised plums."

Without another single demur he takes the extended fruit. There is only one small gap in its velvet side, where Olive's little white teeth had set their mark in its luscious flesh, and finishes it straightway.

"Well," she says at length, watching the process intently; "is it nice?" for he seems to enjoy it immensely.

"Delicious!" he ejaculates, with emphasis, tossing away the stone.

"As nice as you thought it would be when you saw it in my hand just now?" she queries again, jokingly.

"Much nicer," he asserts, with every appearance of earnestness; "In fact, I do not believe I have ever eaten a sweeter peach in my life, and I have eaten a good many, too, in my time."

"It was very ripe," she puts in, quietly. "I am glad you enjoyed it so much."

"I don't quite know whether the reason why I enjoyed it so much was because of its ripeness," he says, with an air of small doubt. "Of course, that might have something to do with it, but I don't believe it was the sole and only cause for that excessive pleasure in its consumption which I confess to feeling while I ate it."

Olive is just going to ask him what other cause there could be, when she suddenly wonders if he meant to infer some pretty speech or other, and stops herself before she opens her mouth for the injudicious query.

"Fruit is always better over ripe than not ripe enough," she says, soberly; and begins to eat one of the golden gages lying on the vine leaf before her.

"True!" he assents briefly. "And now tell me how it is I find you here in the market-place of Quimpaire to-day? I certainly never expected to see you so far from little Pont l'Abbaye. I could hardly believe it really was you at first, which was the reason of my waiting to determine before I spoke."

"I often come over to Quimpaire on market days with Nannette," returns Olive, nodding towards the profile bent over the knitting, still seeming oblivious of these two in conversation.

"So that is Nannette?" he says, lowering his voice in order to escape the old woman's hearing, and looking at the figure on the rush-woven seat under the awning of her little stall.

Olive nods again in answer.

"When I was watching you devouring that peach from afar, before I ventured up, and saw her sitting there, I thought perhaps it might be she—the other lady," he ends somewhat vaguely.

"Do you mean you thought it might be Miss Daunt?" repeats the girl with intense enjoyment in the idea, and lowering her voice too.

"How could I tell whether it was or not? I

certainly did think so for a moment. You see, I did not know what Miss Daunt was like; you never described her to me," he rejoins, amusedly.

"Miss Daunt isn't—half so nice as Nannette," Olive was just beginning to say, but she changed the form of her ending into—"half so old as Nannette."

"Indeed! Is she young then? My impression was that she must be old rather than young," he says, indifferently, as if it was not a matter of great moment to him whether she was youthful or aged.

"Oh, no, not at all young," rejoins Olive, quickly, "nor old either."

"A sort of betwixt and between, I suppose; a sober, steady middle-age!"

"I daresay you will see for yourself if you stay in Pont l'Abbaye any time; especially if you sketch the mill."

"Will she chase me away from the precincts, then, do you think?" he queries comically.

"I can't answer for anything Miss Daunt may or may not do," she answers, with her little, soft, sweet laugh, which he thinks infinitely pleasant to listen to.

"Well," he goes on the next moment, "since that lady sitting there knitting so benevolently out of the sun is only Nannette, there can be no reason why you should not come for a stroll round the market. I am sadly in want of a pioneer to show me all that is to be seen. You will be just the best guide I could have, because, as you are in the habit of coming often, you will know what a tourist, or wanderer like I am, ought to look at, and what he need not trouble about. Do you mind? It would be awfully kind of you if you will," he ends, impressively.

"I don't mind in the very least," she answers, looking up at him; "and I shall be very pleased to be your guide, if you think I can show you anything you have not seen already."

"I haven't seen anything yet, for I only strolled into the market about five minutes before I saw you. I thought I would come over to Quimpaire this morning and see this wonderful old market that the guide-books rave about, so I walked from Pont l'Abbaye to Piongaestel, and took the diligence from there to Quimpaire, and here you see me! So I have not yet had time to view the lions of the town yet, have I! You are going to take compassion upon me, are you not?" he adds, with a faint imploring in his voice.

"Yes, since you really wish it," she returns, rising from her seat, and feeling a sense of pleasure at his request, which she does not take the trouble to account for.

Then she turns to the old woman, busy at her knitting while waiting for her customers.

"Nannette," says Olive, explanatorily, "I am going round the market, and perhaps into the town as well, with—this gentleman."

For the first time since they have been carrying on their animated conversation the old woman turns her snow-white cap in the direction of the two.

"Ah!" she answered, briskly, looking at Alan Chichester keenly from head to foot.

"He is a stranger in Quimpaire, and I am going to show him what there is to be seen," adds the girl, taking up the last of the golden gages, and drinking the rest of her cup of milk.

Possibly Nannette's searching inspection of the stranger proved a satisfactory one to her inner conscience, for she nodded her head at the girl, and said, pleasantly,—

"It is well. Go then, my angel, and be back to me, my Mademoiselle Olive, in time to start on our journey home. I shall be a little later than usual to-day, for I have some little shopping to do."

"Oh! I shall not be gone long, Nannette; only just a short time," exclaims the girl, as the two move slowly off down the market between the rows of garnished stalls.

Nannette looks after them, with a smile on her old, wrinkled brown face. She has not the very faintest notion who this stranger is who has just walked off with her little mademoiselle, or how

Olive became acquainted with him. She has never seen him before, or even heard of him from the girl; but that they have met before to-day she recognises as a fact. How, when, where, are at present mysteries to her.

The kind-hearted old woman is very fond of Olive. She would like to see her happy in her surroundings; that is, happier in a sense that she now is; with pleasant companions, and, perhaps, a sweetheart—a *bien aimé*, as she calls it—for youth is made to be beloved, and to love again, as a natural course; and she sympathises heartily in all the girl's simple, little pleasures such as can be got at Pont l'Abbaye without Miss Daunt's interference and dissent.

Nannette is always glad to help Olive in any small way possible, even if it should be antagonistic to the strict guardian's method; and, indeed, she often rather delights in thwarting her hard discipline, for Miss Daunt is not a favourite at the mill. Neither André or Nannette like her, but then she is a good tenant to them, and is, of course, therefore entitled to some consideration, which they give her as her due.

The girl knows, however, that if she desired to indulge in any escapade, simple and innocent as it would be, she has the old man and wife on her side, ready, if necessary, to shield her, and cover her defaulting.

With all this you can understand, then, that Nannette was not by any means sorry or averse to the idea that Olive had found a pleasant acquaintance of a sudden; though how such an acquaintance had arisen, or for how long it had existed, was at present a mystery in the old woman's comprehension.

That small fact, however, did not trouble her in the very least, and she smiled very pleasantly after the two wandering off together in such friendly fashion; nodding her head in its snow-white cap sagely to herself as she looked at their retreating figures.

"He is a beau monsieur, that one," she said to herself, once more taking up her knitting, which she had laid down while talking to Olive a moment or so back; "and the little mademoiselle looked pleased to go with him too. *Ma foi!* what would our Madame Daunt say if she saw! It is lucky she is not here. As for me, never one word will I say about it. Besides, where is the harm, I should like to know! One can but be young just but once in one's life, that is my idea; and what is the use of being young if one cannot enjoy! When age comes, pleasure is gone for ever in that way; and love is different, quite different. I am old now, and have seen it like that always," ended the old woman, with a little sigh.

In her small way Nannette was a philosopher. She only spoke the truth when she said youth and love go hand-in-hand.

(To be continued.)

In China a wife is never seen by her future master. Some relative bargains for the girl, the stipulated price is paid, and she is afterwards a submissive slave.

ASHESON six feet in length has been found on the Orange River banks. It is coarser than the Canadian product, but is more valuable on account of its length.

In human beings of low or debased mental standard, the ears are large and flabby—note those idiots, cretins, &c. When there is no lobe, and the ear widens from the bottom upwards, the owner is of a selfish, cunning and revengeful disposition. When the ear is oval in form, with the lobe slightly but distinctly marked, it indicates for its owner a lofty idealism, combined with a morbidly sensitive nature. Large round ears with a neat "hem" around their border, well carved—not flat, indicate a strong will and a bulldog tenacity of purpose. Ears in which the "hem" is flat, as if smoothed down with a flat-iron, accompany a vacillating mind and cold, unromantic disposition. The person who has an ear with a rounded, oval top is almost without exceptions one with a placid disposition and a nature that pines to love and be loved in return.

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TINS 3" 6" & 1"
THE NEW BELLOW 9d

THE vast diamond pits at Kimberley are in the largest and most valuable of the craters. The largest of these pits is probably the greatest hole ever dug by man. It is five hundred feet deep and has an area of thirteen acres. Numbers of diagonal shafts lead from the surface to the bottom of the pit, and up and down these shafts are passing continually tramcars. The business of these cars is to carry the blue ground up to the "floors," where it is dumped and left to soften in the sun and rain, for the blue ground is almost as hard as sandstone when taken out. By the combined effect of water and sunlight it gradually softens. The floors are nothing more than great tracts of land that have been cleared of vegetation and have been then rolled to make them as hard and smooth as possible. Each of these floors is six hundred acres in extent. After one of them has been covered to a depth of a foot with blue ground, which has lain long enough to be fairly soft, native with harrows are set to work breaking up the soil.

FACETIÆ.

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Weren't you kissing my daughter when I came in?" Young man: "Yes, sir. Have you any apology to make?"

PHYSICIAN: "After this morning I shall not call again." Patient (joyously): "Then I really am out of all danger!"

THORNE: "Do you really think there will ever be such a thing as universal peace?" Bramble: "I am sure there will not be. My wife would never agree to it."

GREENK: "These wakes of yours are pretty bolsterous affairs sometimes." Finnegan: "Aw course! Sure, we have t' make a great noise t' wake the dead."

MR. STUBB: "Marie, the paper says Lady-smith is just receiving its February mail." Mrs. Stubb: "What married man has been carrying it about in his pocket, John?"

Young Mother (proudly): "Everybody says the baby looks like me." Bachelor Brother (amazed): "The spiteful things don't say that to your face, do they?"

HATTIE: "I'm positive George loves me and wants me to be his wife." Ella: "Has he told you so?" Hattie: "No; but he has taken such a strong dislike to mamma."

HOUSEWIFE: "But you have had a good many situations in a short time!" Servant: "Yes; but that shows, ma'am, how much competition there is to secure my services."

STRANGER: "Pardon me, but you look very much like a man I know." Mr. Higbott: "That may be; but you must excuse me, for you look exactly like a man I don't want to know."

"Here is an article on 'The Right Kind of a Wife,'" she said, looking up from the paper. "I suppose," returned the heartless man, "it refers to the one a fellow doesn't get."

MRS. CRIMSONBEAK: "Has Mr. Crimsonbeak got home for dinner yet, Bridget?" Bridget: "No, mum." "I thought I heard him downstairs." "Sure that was the dog you heard growling, mum."

DEALER: "Would you like to have a French clock?" Mrs. Mulcahy: "No, indeed. I don't want none av yer Frinch clocks. It's a clock that I can understand when it strikes that I want, so I do."

EDITOR: "Well, young woman, if the story suits me, I will pay you £3 for it. Young Lady Author (persuasively): "Oh, come, now. Buy it without reading it, and I'll let you have it for £2."

WIFE: "You've been drinking again." Husband: "Can't help it, m' dear—make me so happy, m' dear." "Hah! Makes you happy, eh? I'd like to know why!" "E(h)cause I shoo two of you, m' dear."

BENEVOLENT PERSONAGE: "Beg pardon for intruding; but I am trying to collect a few subscriptions for a poor family who have no coal, no food, no blankets, no— Average Individual: "Land sakes, man! Christmas is over."

YOUNG PHYSICIAN (diagnosing a case): "In the first place, sir, you must drink less coffee." Patient: "I never drink any coffee at all, sir." Young Physician: (considerably annoyed): "Well, then, you ought to."

TOO GOOD: "Jack, have you that ten pounds I lent you the other day?" Hardpuke: "Not all of it, old chap; but what I have left will do me a day or two longer. Decidedly kind and thoughtful of you to inquire, though!"

HUBBARD (sniffing): "Seems to me I smell kerosene." Wife: "Yes; by the way, my dear, you must go to the intelligence office and get a new girl. You can ride down with the undertaker."

TRAMP: "Lady, could you help a poor man dat broke his arm through patriotism?" Lady: "Were you in the war?" Tramp: "No'm; I broke it turning an organ." Lady: "Well, where does the patriotism come in?" Tramp: "I was playing 'Rule, Britannia!' ma'am."

BILKINS: "There comes Jinks. He's a hateful fellow." Wilkins: "Is he one of those miserable, low-down dead-beats who are always borrowing money?" Bilkins: "N—o, he—er—he—um—er—never has any to lend."

THE TRAMP: "Once I was in a fair way ter becomin' a millionaire, but a labour-savin' device ruined me." The Farmer: "Ye don't say so! How's that?" The Tramp: "I was gettin' along nicely as a barman in a public house when the gov'nor bought a cash register."

"So you studied the Russian language?" "Yes. I make it a rule to learn something of the language of every country I visit." "Did you make any progress?" "Yes. I could tell whether the railway porters were calling out the name of a station or catching colds."

YOUNG ADDLEPATE: "Aw, do you think that an astrologer by being told the date of my birth could tell me when my misfortunes were to begin?" Old Grufficus: "Possibly not, but he could tell when your parents' misfortunes began."

"Did you shoot anything?" "Did I shoot anything?" exclaimed the amateur sportsman. "Rather! I shot my dog, a cow, a couple of tame ducks, and two fingers off, and I came pretty nearly shooting a rabbit, but he ran in a hole."

"YOUNG MAN," shouted the irate father, "if I ever catch you here again I'll use my cane." "As you suffer with the gout," responded the young man, "you'll probably use your cane whether you catch me or not." Then the cane was used.

"WHEN I goe a-shoppin'," said an old lady, "I allers asks for what I wants, and if they have it, and it's suitable, and I feel inclined to take it, and it's cheap, and it can't be got at any place for less, I almost allers take it, without chaffering about it all day, as most people do."

MOTHER: "Was your aunt glad to see you, and Tommy, and Frankie and Fred?" Johnny: "Yes, mamma." Mother: "Did she invite you to call again?" Johnny: "Yes; and she told us to bring you and paps, and Susie, and the dog, next time!"

OLD FRIEND: "You should always take your wife into your confidence. Women appreciate that sort of thing." De Broker: "Oh, I do that; that is, in part." Old Friend: "You tell her of your gains and losses, I presume?" De Broker: "I always tell her of my losses."

"YOUNG MAN," said the careful father, "if I consent to your marrying my daughter, will you furnish her the luxuries to which she is accustomed?" "Well, said the young man, "it is more than likely that I shall not take her to as many theatres as I have been doing for the past year."

"ROOKIE, you've met your match this time!" snarled a Boer who had managed to disarm a private of the Devons. "Oh, have I?" replied the soldier, scornfully. "I generally strike a match!" And he let out a left-hander with dire effect. That Boer lost a prisoner, but gained such a lovely black eye.

SHE: "Harry, Kate Snowhill has a diamond ring that her lover, Fred Stilton, gave her. Fanny that you never gave me any diamond ring." He: "Nellie, it is only girls who are not precious in themselves who require the embellishment of precious stones." She: "Oh, Harry, what a dear fellow you are!"

No, she could not think of becoming his wife. "But I entreat you not to go to the dogs!" she exclaimed. "I shall not, since you ask it!" he sobbed. And he was true to his word. He did not go to the dogs. It was perhaps better, after all, that a man with so little real insight into the feminine nature should never marry.

The following dialogue took place recently between a married couple on their travels:—"My dear, are you comfortable in that corner?" "Quite, thank you, my dear." "Sure there's plenty of room for your feet!" "Quite sure, love." "And no cold air from the window by your ear?" "Quite certain, darling." "Then, my dear, I'll change places with you."

THE GUEST: "Isn't your little boy rather nervous, Mrs. Bimm?" Mrs. Bimm: "No, I think not." Little Boy: "Yes, I am, ma; when people who come here stay too long it makes me wriggle around and kick my chair."

A LADY in deep mourning walked into the office of the Judge of Probate, and inquired: "Are you the Judge of Probates?" "I am the Judge of Probate," was the reply. "Well, that's it, I expect," said the lady. "You see, my husband died testate, and left me several little infidels, and I want to be appointed their executioner."

BILKINS: "So you didn't go to the masquerade ball?" Wilkins: "No; I made a fool of myself there last season, and I didn't care to risk it again." "Eh! Didn't drink too much, did you?" "No. But when the masks were removed, I discovered that I'd wasted a whole evening and four pounds spooning with my wife."

"WHAT'S the difference between a bet and a wager?" asked the man who thinks there are too many words in the English language. "A bet," said the friend who always wears a dress coat after 6 o'clock, "is something you make with a man which has to be paid, no matter who loses. A wager is something more refined. It's made with a woman, and is not considered collectible unless she wins."

NELLIE: "That Clara De Note is just the meanest, most utterly selfish girl I ever saw. She never thinks of anyone but herself." Dora: "Do tell!" Nellie: "Yes. I ran in there the other evening for a few moments, and while I was there Mr. Niccetto called. Well, it wasn't long before he requested her to play. He's passionately fond of music, you know. Well, what do you think that girl did! She asked him to come to the piano and turn the music for her, just so I couldn't talk to him."

HOW GEMS MAY BE MANUFACTURED.

ONE of the most striking articles in the May number of the *Windsor Magazine* deals with the wonderful developments that are being opened up in Science by the Electrical Furnaces at Niagara Falls. So far they have not yet succeeded in manufacturing diamonds in quantities, but the day does not seem far distant when even these will be shipped from the Falls in peck boxes. The origin of the discovery was as follows:—"Mr. Acheson conjectured that carbon, if made to combine with clay, would produce an extremely hard substance; and that, having been combined with the clay, if it should in the cooling separate again from the clay, it would issue out of the operation as diamond. He therefore mixed a little clay and coke dust together, placed them in a crucible, inserted the ends of two electric-light carbons into the mixture, and connected the carbons with a dynamo. The fierce heat generated at the points of the carbon fused the clay, and caused portions of the carbon to dissolve. After cooling, a careful examination was made of the mass, and a few small purple crystals were found. They sparkled with something of the brightness of diamonds, and were so hard that they scratched glass. Mr. Acheson decided at once that they could not be diamonds, but he thought they might be rubies or sapphires. A little later, though, when he had made similar crystals of a larger size, he found that they were harder than rubies, even scratching the diamond itself. He showed them to a number of expert jewellers, chemists, and geologists. They had so much the appearance of natural gems that many experts to whom they were submitted without explanation decided that they must certainly be of natural production. Even so eminent an authority as Goikie, the Scotch geologist, on being told, after he had examined them, that the crystals were manufactured in America, responded testily, "These Americans! What won't they claim next! Why, man, those crystals have been in the earth a million years."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen's birthday is to be celebrated in London on the 23rd of May, and at all other naval and military stations on the actual date, May 24th. No date has been fixed as yet for Her Majesty's visit to town.

THERE will, it is said, be a garden-party at Buckingham Palace on the occasion of the Shah's visit. It is not certain that the Queen would be present at it, as much depends upon the weather, but all other members of the Royal Family in London would attend it.

ROYAL engagements appear to be the order of the day in Germany. The betrothal of the Bavarian heir to the throne and his cousin, Duchess Marie Gabrielle, third and youngest daughter of Duke Karl Theodor of Bavaria by his second wife, Princess Maria Josefa, Duchess of Braganza, Infanta of Portugal, has given universal satisfaction. Naturally the Bavarians are delighted that one of their own princesses will some day reign over them.

THE marriage of the Princess Marie Louise of Cumberland with Prince Max of Baden has been fixed for June 26th, and will be attended by the Princess of Wales, with Princess Victoria, the Dowager-Empress of Russia with her children, the King of the Hellenes, and other relations. The Queen of Hanover and Princess Mary, with the whole of the Cumberland family, arrive this week at Gmunden, and will spend the summer there.

WHEN at Sandringham the Prince of Wales dines at a quarter to nine, and the meal never lasts longer than an hour if he can avoid it. Those who find delight in small matters may be interested to know that he does not sit at the end but in the middle seat of the table, and in the midst of the guests. While everything is of the best, simplicity characterises all the arrangements. The modern fashion of elaborate centrepieces finds no support there, bowls and vases of flowers constituting the sole decoration.

ACCORDING to German rule, the Kaiser's eldest son has now attained his majority, and the question of his marriage will come within the range of practical politics. Already rumour has found at least one bride for him, unimpaired of the fact that the Crown Prince's own choice has to be taken into consideration, as well as the feelings of the princesses in question. The Queen is much interested in her great-grandson's matrimonial future. It would delight her if he were married during her lifetime, as he would be the first of her great-grandchildren in direct succession to a throne to place her in the possible position of standing at the head of five generations. The Crown Prince will visit Her Majesty this year.

WHEN Queen Victoria ascended the throne, all the jewels left by George III. and George IV. became hers. Among them was a fine pearl necklace that had belonged to Queen Charlotte, wife of George III. Soon after the Queen's marriage to the Prince Consort, the King of Hanover claimed the pearls as part of the Crown jewels of Hanover. The claim was submitted to the law officers of England, who had, though with reluctance, to give their decision against the Queen. The pearls are now worn on great occasions by the Duchess of Cumberland, sister of the Princess of Wales. Immediately on the decision being made known, the East India Company presented the Queen with a fine set of pearls, far superior to those she relinquished.

THE Duke of Albany, who is now at Potsdam, has begun his new course of study. His Royal Highness made his first appearance at the Cadet School at Potsdam on the 20th ult. He drives there every morning, and is driven back after his lessons are finished to the Villa Jagowheim. Six of the cadets from Lichterfeld are being educated with him, so he has no lack of companions.

STATISTICS.

THE human skin is perforated with 1,000 holes in every square inch.

FOR every million inhabitants in Russia there is only an average of ten newspapers.

TURKEY, in Tripoli and Egypt, owns about 850,000 square miles of the African continent.

THE length of the world's railways is more than seventeen times the circumference of the earth at the Equator.

OF the forty-five million bullets fired by the Russians during the Crimean war, 44,952,000 failed to fulfil their errand of death.

SOUND passes through air at the velocity of 1,142 feet per second; through water, 4,900 feet; through iron, 17,500 feet.

A GERMAN mathematician has calculated that three tons of sea-water hold about a half-pennyworth of gold, and that if all the gold in the oceans of the globe could be collected it would make a solid cube measuring 718 metres on each side, and worth about £290,000,000,000,000.

GEMS.

OUR drifting dreams furnish no fitting for the reality of the rapids.

OF things that are in our power are our opinions, impulses, pursuits, avoidances, and, in brief, all that is of our own doing.

WE must try to grasp the spirit of things, to see correctly, to speak to the point, to give practicable advice, to act on the spot, to arrive at the proper moment, to stop in time. Tact, measure, occasion—all these deserve our cultivation and respect.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ROAST SUCKING PIG.—The sooner a sucking pig is cooked the better, as every day's delay takes away from its flavour. It may be stuffed with breadcrumbs mixed with butter, powdered sage, pepper and salt, and sewn up securely. Baste constantly with butter to prevent the cracking from blistering. Serve either with gravy or melted butter in a tureen. The brains and some of the stuffing may be mixed with the sauce.

CODFISH CAKE.—Soak one pound of codfish in cold water several hours, then place it in the saucepan over the fire, cover with cold water; as soon as it begins to boil drain off the water, cover again with cold water and let it come to a boiling point; then drain off all the water, remove the bones, chop the fish fine and mix it with an equal portion of mashed potatoes; add one-half tablespoonful of butter, one egg; form the mixture into round balls the size of an egg, flatten and fry light brown in dripping or lard; serve on a hot dish with catsup.

NOTTINGHAM PUDDING.—Ingredients: Six apples (medium-sized) half a pint of milk, two eggs, half a pound of flour, half a teaspoonful of baking powder, tablespoonful of white sugar, and a little spice. Peel the apples, take out the cores, and fill the cavities with sugar; put them in a buttered plate, leaving a space between them. Make a batter with the milk, eggs, flour, baking powder, and sugar; pour over the apples, filling up the vacant spaces, and bake in a moderate oven until the apples are quite soft, but not broken up, about forty minutes. Any fruit in season, or dried fruits, such as figs, dates, prunes, &c., can be added to batter for puddings, either baked or boiled; for juicy fruits, such as plums or damsons, however, the batter should be rather thicker, nine or ten ounces of flour being used instead of eight.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE British West Indies comprise an area of 12,175 miles.

USUALLY with long-lived folk the body is long and the legs short.

THE only European country which has a lower death-rate than England is Norway.

THE military rule is that five times the number of an entrenched enemy are required to dislodge the latter.

IN Canada the bridges across the rivers have spear-shaped buttresses to split the ice in winter.

NEW ZEALAND has a law making it compulsory in all disputes between capital and labour for the disputants to submit to arbitration.

IT is said that the colour tones of the sky have an influence upon the character and temperament of the people who live under them.

DESCENDANTS of the missionaries in the Hawaiian Islands constitute about 1-20th of the white population, exclusive of the Portuguese.

PEOPLE buried in an avalanche hear distinctly every word uttered by those who are seeking them, while the buried ones most strenuous shouts fail to penetrate even a few feet of snow.

LONG before School-boards were established in England Canadian children were instructed free of cost between the ages of seven and twelve. This education is compulsory.

IN Iceland men and women are in every respect political equals. The nation, which numbers about 70,000 people, is governed by representatives elected by men and women together.

ALMOST every day in summer there appears above the peak of Mont Blanc a beautifully formed cloud-cap standing some distance above it, and hollowed out underneath like an inverted cup.

MURDER is not considered a very great crime by the Parsees of India. According to their code, a murderer receives ninety stripes on his bare back, while the man who neglects his dog receives 200 stripes.

IT has been observed that artesian wells have a daily period of ebb and flow, as well as the ocean tides, only the process is reversed. The time of greatest flow of an artesian well is the period of low tide in the ocean.

TWINS are considered a curse by some of the superstitious tribes of Africa. It is customary to put them out of existence immediately after birth by breaking their backs. The mother becomes an outcast, and must not drink from the spring belonging to her relations.

IN regard to colours we are far behind the ancients. None of the colours in the Egyptian paintings of thousands of years ago are in the least faded, except the greens. In Pompeii the Tyrian purple is as fresh as it was three thousand years ago. The colours on the walls of Nero's festal vault are as fresh as if painted yesterday. So is the cheek of the Egyptian princess who was contemporary with Solomon, and Cleopatra, at whose feet Caesar laid the riches of his empire. In regard to metals, the ancients were our equals, if not superiors. The edges of the obelisk of Egypt, and of the ancient wall of Rome are as sharp as if hewn yesterday, and the stones remain as closely fitted that the seams cannot be penetrated with a knife blade. When French artists engraved two lines on an obelisk brought from Egypt they destroyed in the tedious task many of the best tools that could be manufactured. Yet these ancient monuments are traced all over with inscriptions by Egyptian artists forty centuries ago. Ventilation is a modern art, but apertures undoubtedly made for ventilating purposes are found in the pyramids. Thousands of years ago the Pagans ventilated their tombs, while we scarcely know yet how to ventilate our houses!

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LOCAL.—The Queen is four feet ten inches high.

A. B.—Yes; prove it at Somerset House, Strand.

LENA.—Dissolve wax and oil of turpentine together.

A. L.—It would be simpler and safer to make a fresh will.

E. D.—"Robinson Crusoe" was written by Daniel Defoe.

GERARD.—Majuba Hill is situated in the extreme north of Natal.

H. C.—Incomes net exceeding £100 per annum are free from taxation.

RUSSELL.—Always follow the lady, stepping forward to open the door for her.

HILDA.—Lapoline is good. Avoid any greasy preparation, such as vasoline, &c.

LOLA.—Charcoal powder and plain precipitated chalk are among the best dentifrices.

A.—Paraffin is said to be good. Consult your doctor; he will give you the best advice.

BRENDA.—You cannot be too chary of favours accorded to the opposite sex who are not relatives.

CORINNA.—Hot cross buns are relics of the unlearned bread of the Jews eaten at the Paschal feast.

G. G.—"Upwards" in the sense you refer to, means "more than, with tendency to a higher or greater number."

S. R.—Minc cloths, ten parts; blamuth subnitrate, twenty parts; beta-naphthol, one part; starch, sixty-five parts.

HAL.—You are too old to enter the Royal Navy as an apprentice; but you might be apprenticed to the merchant service.

MIRKA.—How long it would take to learn German depends entirely upon your application and the ability of your teacher.

CONSTANT READER.—A crow has instinct, not reason, but we do not profess to say where the one faculty ends and the other begins.

L. B.—If a husband leaves his wife without any lawful excuse for so doing, she may bring an action for restitution of conjugal rights.

SUPPERMAN.—The uncomfortable feeling is undoubtedly due to indigestion. You should be very careful of your diet, and take regular exercise.

BEATRICE.—Covering cheese with vinegar will, it is stated, keep it from moulding, while the flavour of the cheese will not be in the least altered.

H. L.—The only way is to wash with soap and water, then shake and dry before fire, curling by drawing over edge of knife under thumb when almost dry.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—If the falling out of your hair is consequent upon illness it is very difficult for us to advise you. You should consult a doctor.

JIM.—Major Marchand remained at Fashoda for about a month after the Sirar had requested him to leave; he then retired on being ordered by his own Government.

MARTIN.—We would advise you to teach yourself to forget the young man as speedily as possible. He was evidently far from sincere in the avowal of love he made you in the past.

ELLEN.—Meats to be roasted or broiled should be given the greatest amount of heat possible at first, so that the surface may be hardened and the juices all retained in the roast.

REMI.—The £ is the sign for the American dollar. Taking the value of a dollar at 4s. 10d. English money, you can easily calculate the English equivalent of any sum specified in dollars.

OLD READER.—The Mongoose is a native of warm climates, and we think would be taken in this country; it is not necessary, however, to have a pair, and the animal is easily domesticated.

REUEL.—A cheap floor stain is made by dissolving potassiumate of potash in warm water, giving one or two teacups to the boards, and when thoroughly dry polishing with beeswax and turpentine.

GERALDINE.—Boil Epsom salts in a little water. Strain, add to a half-pint of this liquor add ten drops of ammonia. Sprinkle the frock lightly with this, and while still damp, iron on the wrong side over a towel.

HOUSEWIFE.—Carpets should occasionally be brushed the way of the pile with a hard brush, and carpet-sweep and fairly hot water, then rubbed dry with a cloth; but note that colours of cheap carpets "run" when dampened.

HENRIETTA.—Newspaper work for women is a hard business. There are a few successful writers, reporters, dress-describers, and others calling themselves journalists; but, as a rule, it is not work to be so highly commended as you think, nor is it as well paid. There are a few conspicuous successes, it is true.

PANIEL.—One pound raisins stoned and cut open, the kind of one lemon thinly pared, three-quarters of an ounce best ginger, bruised; steep these in one quart of the best French brandy till sufficiently flavoured; then strain and add one pound of finely powdered sugar; when this is thoroughly melted, bottle.

BESS.—If the range be wiped carefully with a soft cloth, after cooking greasy food, it can be kept bright with little difficulty. The range should be kept free from soot in all compartments. A clogged hot air passage will prevent any oven from baking well.

IN GAZET DUTIES.—If you do not summon your courage and strength of mind before it is too late, it cannot fail to be a matter of life-long regret, both to you and the man you had so wronged as to marry. It is seldom easy to rectify a mistake of any kind, and such a one as you have made is a particularly grave one, but not yet irremediable.

S. M.—Fruit is said to be best preserved by boiling it in juice or syrup from the same kind of fruit. For example, apples boiled in cider will keep longer in air-tight vessels—bottles or jars—than when boiled any other way. And the longer whole apples are boiled in cider the longer they will keep. Peas cooked in perry may be kept a long time.

OLLIE.—The simplest way to re-curl feathers is to shake them before a clear fire, and then, with a paper-knife, coax them to their original form, treating each tenderly separately. Another way is to damp the feathers and curl them round wiring pins, leaving them for twenty-four hours, then loosen the waves by the gentle application of a comb.

W. S.—Lay the part to be cleaned on a sheet of blotting paper; damp the stain with water, and also a good margin all round the stain. Wet a sponge to make it greedy; then squeeze the sponge, but not quite dry, and dip it into benzine, and pass the sponge repeatedly over the stain. Then lay a sheet of blotting paper above and below the fabric, and pass a hot iron over it, finally washing out with warm water.

SUNSHINE AND SHADE.

There are passing hours of sadness,
There are fleeting hours of pain;
There are hours of joy and gladness,
There is sunshine, there is rain.
There are trials and there are troubles,
There is many a grief and care;
But for every heart the sunshine
Has a ray of brightness there.

When the heart is bowed with sorrow,
In the evening dark and drear,
The sun may shine to-morrow,
And will dry the falling tear,
For sorrow looks the blackest
When the evening shades descend;
But grief has never fallen,
Time has not the power to mend.

When grief comes, try to beat it,
For it comes to one and all;
Never go half-way to meet it,
In the own good time 'twill eil,
It may lightly touch, or heavy
Leave upon the heart its trace;
And the heart that bravely fights it
Is the one with smiling face.

Life is not all gloom and sadness,
It is not all tears and wiles;
There are days of joy and gladness,
Hours of pleasure and of smiles,
And the heart that's really happy,
The heart no sorrow nimb,
Is the one that's philosophic,
And takes life as it comes.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—If your boy's limbs are well-formed, and he is healthy, there is really nothing more required than constant encouragement to the youngster to get upon his feet; there are wheeled arrangements in which a child can be Greek and heavy to push himself about in upright position, but there is always the danger of injury to the chest or malformation of spine with such contrivances.

B. J.—What is left from the day before should be dropped into a mixture of boiling milk and water, and let boil for five minutes, then cut it into thin strips, and have some butter, such as you would use for Yorkshire pudding; dip each strip into this, and fry in boiling fat, of which there must be plenty in the pan, and it must be boiling to the extent of having a thin blue smoke rising from it.

WALTER.—Writer's cramp is a peculiar kind of local spasm, in which every attempt to write calls forth uncontrollable movements in the thumb, index and middle finger, so that, instead of legible handwriting, a mere scrawl appears. The spasms are chiefly that of weight and constriction of the hand, with pain extending occasionally from the upper arm to the back. The disease is usually confined to middle age, and rarely occurs in women.

MABEL.—In packing flowers to be sent by post or rail it is essential to put wet moss round the base of the stems, and to cover the whole of the flowers with some material which will keep the moisture in and prevent the air from drying up the contents. Cotton wool is perhaps the worst of all materials to use. For this purpose tin, cardboard, or thin wooden boxes may be used. If the post goes out very early the flowers should be cut as late as possible the evening before and placed in water for the night. Flowers of bulbous plants generally should be gathered when the buds are half-open. If the box is not well filled, the flowers should be fastened with twine passed through holes in the box.

BART.—Lamp chimneys, if held over steam, and quickly wiped out with a dry cloth which is quite free from lint, will be just as bright and shining as if laboriously washed with soap and water.

G. F.—Make a strong solution of gum arabic and water, and stir in enough plaster-of-Paris, to form a soft paste. Brush this over the broken edges, press firmly together, keep in a dry place for three days, and then scrape off any superfluous cement.

L. G.—Take half a pound of soap, a ball of powdered whiting, and enough warm water to make it of the consistency of cream. Shred the soap into a jug, add the powdered whiting, and mix with warm water. Rub it well over the covers, and when dry polish them with a clean leather and dry powdered whiting.

FLORENCE.—Use warm, not hot, soda, made with soft water and best white soap. Do not soak the material, and wash only one thing at a time. Change the soda as soon as it looks dingy, and put the garments at once into fresh soda. Rinse first in clear water, and then in water slightly blue. Squeeze quite dry, but do not wring the goods. Hang in a shady place where the sunshine will not strike it, as that fades all colours.

MAID MARION.—Make the chocolate, allowing a heaping teaspoonful to each half-pint of boiling water. Stir the chocolate with a little hot water until smooth and shiny before adding the full amount. Cook in a double boiler for five minutes, sweetening it to taste. When cold half a cup of cream is added, with a half-teaspoonful of vanilla extract or two or three drops of cinnamon, after the custom of the Mexicans. Whip with a Dover egg-beater until light and foamy, and serve with shippied ice in tall glasses.

GRATEFUL READER.—Use equal parts of soft soap and water and let it boil. If the soap is very thick, it may be necessary to use double the quantity of water. Wring the linen in this when dry, and take it out as wet as possible. Then put it out on a clean place in the open sunlight and sprinkle table salt thickly over it. Keep watch of it, and as it becomes dry sprinkle with a very fine watering-pot, so as to keep it wet, but do not put on enough water to wash off the soap and salt. Let it remain out day and night, and the mildew will gradually disappear. This has been thoroughly tested, and has taken out mildew when the garments were almost black.

DETERMINED.—The room to be fumigated must be tightly closed, even the keyholes stopped with paper; then closets, trunks, drawers and all insected receptacles must be opened, so the fumes of the sulphur can penetrate every nook and cranny. The candle is put in a metal candlestick and set in an earthen or iron vessel—a coal-bod will answer quite as well as anything else. The only requisite is that it shall be deep enough to prevent the flames setting fire to anything. The room should be kept closed for about four hours. These candles must not be used where there is gilt paper, picture rails, or picture frames, as they will be tarred.

GIRSY.—"Urim and Thummim" signify light and direction. Much dispute has arisen among the learned as to what this ceremony was among the ancient Jews, but no certainty has hitherto been arrived at. It is conjectured to have been some means of inducing an answer from God upon extraordinary occurrences. The high priest was the officiating minister, and whenever the ceremony was performed he was dressed in his richest ornaments and wore the most costly ornaments. It was never used for a private person or occasion, but only for a king, the president of the Sanhedrin, the general of the army, &c., and always upon some occasion relating to the common welfare of the Church or State.

BETTY.—To keep butter firm in warm weather cover it with a large clean flower-pot; dip a piece of coarse flannel in cold water, lay it over the flower-pot and sprinkle freely with salt. The salt keeps the flannel moist, and this simple contrivance keeps the butter firm and cool. If fresh fish is soft from the heat, dip in vinegar, and wipe with a clean cloth before cooking. A freshly-cut onion laid near game or poultry will keep away flies and preserve the bird from taint. Permanganate of potash, or Condy's fluid, should be kept in every household in hot weather. If meat, fish, or poultry has unexpectedly to be kept uncooked a day longer than was intended, lay it in a weak solution of Condy or permanganate all night. Meat that looks the least bit tainted should be thoroughly cleaned before cooking. The method is simple. Put a little permanganate of potash in a bowl of cold water, wash the joints well in this, letting it be till sweet. Failing the permanganate, use vinegar and water.

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